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# Editor's DESK

by John M. Buchanan

## Muslim neighbors

ON A RECENT TRIP to Dallas I watched on TV as hundreds of Muslims attending a conference were confronted by red-faced protesters carrying American flags and signs: "America Is a Christian Nation. Muslims Are Not Welcome!" "Islamists: Go Back Where You Came From and Take Obama With You!" They were responding to what a tiny cell of Islamic extremists did in Paris—murdering most of the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial staff, a police officer, and four customers at a kosher grocery store.

Muslims have spoken up in response to the attacks, decrying the violence and distancing themselves from the acts. In *Time* magazine, former NBA star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar described how Muslims are required, after a terrorist attack carried out by Islamic extremists, to "disavow and explain—again—how these barbaric acts are in no way related to Islam."

Yet it's not helpful to gloss over the fact that the perpetrators of these acts of violence use the rhetoric, if not the theology, of a form of Islam. As Thomas Friedman wrote, "It is not good for us or the Muslim world to pretend that this spreading jihadist violence isn't coming out of their faith community. It is coming mostly, but not exclusively, from angry young men and

preachers on the fringes of the Sunni Arab and Pakistani communities in the Middle East and Europe."

Although jihadist violence is abhorrent to the vast majority of Muslims, there is a form of Islam that is spawning it. University of Chicago lecturer Azeem Ibrahim explains that Wahhabism, named for Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, emerged in the 18th century and was based on the conviction that most Muslims had strayed from authentic Islam. Purifying the religion led to excommunications, purges, and executions of apostate Muslims. Ibrahim says that Wahhabism would be a footnote in history except for the discovery of oil. Saudi Arabia finds it convenient to use its oil wealth to promote Wahhabism as a way to support the monarchy and maintain the status quo.

We need to slow down and think carefully about what is happening. Then perhaps we can reach out to Muslim neighbors. Churches could contact their local Islamic organization or mosque and invite Muslim brothers and sisters to sit down and break bread together. Hans Küng said that there will be no world peace until there is peace among world religions, and there will be no peace among religions until there is dialogue. Those words were never more relevant and urgent than now.

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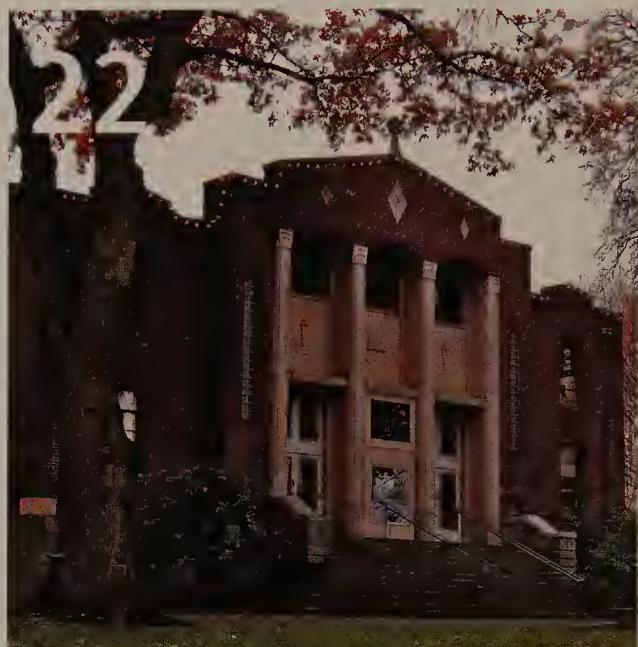
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Washington Island Forum, outside back cover

## Hospice for dying churches

The articles on dying well ("The last Sunday" by Angie Mabry-Nauta; "Final gifts" by Adam Joyce; Jan. 7) moved me to think about hospice, churches, congregations, and how church personalities resemble individual families and persons. There are many dying congregations in every denomination, plus others that are wrongly euthanized.

What about an institutional hospice program for churches? St. Paul tells us the body of Christ, the church, is like a human body. Those parts that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. If one part suffers, every part suffers; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Some parts are less presentable than others, but still we are to care for all. We are to look especially after those parts that suffer. It is the responsibility of all of us who love and serve the church to help some churches have a "good death," if not an actual resurrection in a new form. As with hospice, there just might be an occasional resuscitation of an occasional congregation.

Imagine taking seriously the pastoral commitment to help members of dying congregations and ourselves understand not only the value of a good death, but also the care that follows—offering a good grieving process and looking forward to the hope of a resurrection into some form other than the life we so tenaciously cling to.

Robert Campbell  
Cleveland, Ohio

### Merton in today's world . . .

It was good to see Carol Zaleski's appreciation of Thomas Merton ("A letter to Thomas Merton," Jan. 21). I agree with her about the *contemptus mundi* that enervates *The Seven Storey Mountain*—a contempt and religious narrowness that Merton later disavowed.

Zaleski then describes Merton's translation of monastic spirituality as "an idiom of authenticity and alienation that now seems dated." One can't back up every statement in a short piece, but "dated" seems more than a little unfair. One could easily argue that Merton's discussions of authenticity and alienation—the true and false self—are, in this day of the Kardashians, denigration of the poor, and endless war, even more relevant.

Tim Vivian  
Bakersfield, Calif.

### A sacred covenant . . .

Katherine Willis Pershey's "A long obedience" (Jan. 21) gave me the clearest understanding of the meanings of *contract* and *covenant*. The words are no longer interchangeable for me. One is conditional, the other unconditional. Both can be broken, but the one is destroyed thereby, while the other remains. One is legal, but the other is sacred. I love her summary conclusion: "A contract is to covenant as ink is to blood."

It grieves me that in America our devotion to individual rights and personal happiness has stolen the security and joy of long obedience. We want to keep our options open. We have been so careless with language that the once sacred covenant of marriage is reduced to a contract between two people, any two people. I am not sure the Supreme Court can fix it without contributing to the carelessness.

What makes a covenant sacred? I have often characterized Christian marriage as held together by each spouse's bond with God more than by bonds with each other. Christian marriage is a covenant of the covenanted.

Stephen E. Fletcher  
Glendale, Calif.

February 18, 2015

## Raise the gas tax

**I**magine a tax increase that makes sense to Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, the Chamber of Commerce and unions, truckers and environmentalists. Imagine a tax increase that some politicians would call a “no-brainer.”

That would be an increase in the tax on gasoline. And since gas is cheaper than it’s been in years, now is an opportune moment to enact it.

For years environmentalists have called for a tax on carbon-emitting fuels as a way of steering consumer and corporate behavior. The aim is to reduce the burning of coal and gasoline, which releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and contributes to the heating of the planet. Raising the price of gas would discourage consumption, reduce pollution, encourage the use of alternative transportation, and spur the purchase of fuel-efficient vehicles.

At the same time, corporations and business groups have wanted to increase the gas tax in order to pay for repairing the nation’s highways, bridges, transit systems, airports, and seaports. Infrastructure has been neglected for decades. Some 70,000 bridges—one in nine—are deemed structurally deficient. The Interstate Highway System, created in the 1960s, needs major repairs. Last year, then transportation secretary Ray LaHood declared, “Our infrastructure is on life support.”

Federal spending on infrastructure has fallen to its lowest levels in 60 years. The Highway Trust Fund is expected to run out of money in May if Congress does not transfer more into it or raise fuel taxes. Congress has not raised the gas tax since 1993, when it was set at 18.4 percent. A modest tax hike would replenish the Highway Fund and, at current prices, still leave drivers economically ahead.

Spending to repair highways, bridges, and rail lines is not only an investment in the nation’s economic future. It supports the creation of good jobs now. That’s why unions support a tax hike for spending on infrastructure.

Raising the gas tax would be a burden for low-income families, however. Any increase should come with a provision that mitigates this impact, whether through greater federal benefits or targeted tax breaks.

Since June gas prices have dropped 40 percent to an average of a little over \$2 a gallon—a six-year low. Congress could view this drop as simply a windfall for consumers. Or it could be seen as the occasion for a long-overdue investment in the economy and the environment. It’s a no-brainer.

**The falling price of gas creates an opportune moment.**

# CENTURY marks

**SHELTER CHEF:** Jonathan Gushue was an internationally regarded chef at an upscale restaurant in Cambridge, Ontario, but he left the job in 2013. Now he can be seen volunteering as a cook at a homeless shelter in Cambridge. A recovering alcoholic, he says it has been good for him to work alongside the homeless. People at the shelter are thrilled to have him teach them new ways to use the food that is donated. "He taught us there's five ways to make gravy," said one shelter staff person. "We just thought there were two" (*Cambridge Times*, January 20).

**JURY DUTY:** Jury selection in the trial of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, defendant in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, is expected to take a long time. On the first day of interviewing, juror no. 10 identified himself a professor of theology at a Catholic college and said he is opposed to the death penalty except in situations where there is no prison to

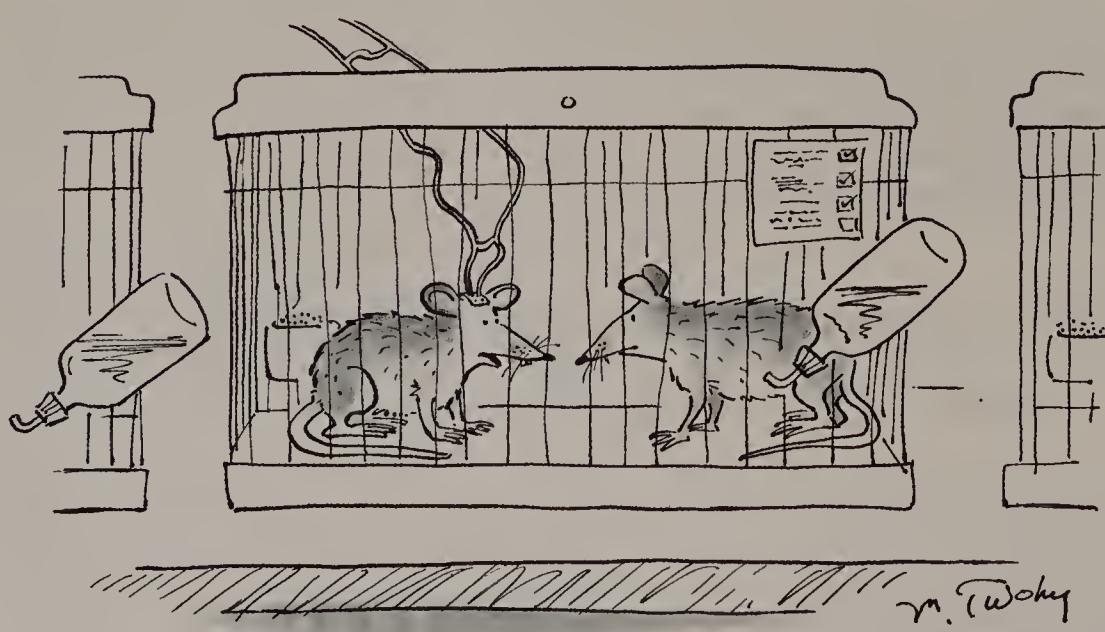
house a person for life. He said that if he were to support the death penalty, his department might deny him tenure. "They would wonder what I know about Catholic social ethics," he said (*New York Times*, January 15).

**IMAGO DEI:** In prerevolutionary Russia, criminals were called unfortunates. Instead of being executed, most of those convicted of murder and other serious crimes were sent to Siberian labor camps. There were, in fact, very few executions in prerevolutionary Russia. John of Kronstadt, a 19th-century saint, captured this benevolent spirit toward delinquents: "Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him, because evil is but a chance misfortune, illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement" (Jim Forest, *Loving Our Enemies*, Orbis).

**MUMMY FIND:** Craig Evans, a New Testament scholar at Acadia Divinity College in Canada, claims to have found a fragment of the Gospel of Mark, dating from around AD 90. If this claim holds up, it would be the oldest extant fragment of what is generally believed to be the earliest Gospel. The fragment was found in the unlikeliest of places—it was part of a mummy mask. The details of the discovery have not yet been published, nor has it been subjected to peer review. Some nonbiblical ancient texts have been discovered in mummy masks (*Washington Post*, January 20).

**POPE IN A HURRY:** Pope Francis has an apocalyptic sense of urgency about the world in which we live. That may be fed partly by his fondness for the 1907 novel *Lord of the World*, by Robert Hugh Benson. In this dystopian novel featuring a conflict between secular humanism and Catholicism, an Anti-christ savior figure emerges who attacks Christian symbols and believers and advocates euthanasia. The pope appears to believe that on issues like economics and the environment, decisions are being made from which there is no turning back. His own peripatetic style and extensive travel plans evince his sense of urgency about his papal role (*Crux*, January 25).

**AID, NOT BLOCKADE:** Roman Catholic bishops who visited Gaza in January have called for the Israeli government to lift its long-standing blockade of Gaza and to take greater action to alleviate poverty there. Members of the Holy Land Coordination group, which travels to the region annually, were struck by the widespread devasta-



"I'm not religious—just anti-science."

tion from the recent Gazan conflict, which killed about 2,000 Palestinians and 70 Israelis. Alleviating the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza is in the security interests of the state of Israel, the bishops declared. The Israeli government blames the poverty in Gaza on the ruling group Hamas (*National Catholic Reporter*, January 16).

#### PROTEST AS PRAYER:

Susannah Heschel, daughter of the late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, says it was a big mistake for the makers of the film *Selma* to leave her father out of the picture. By excluding him, *Selma* fails to convey how diverse that civil rights march was. It included “an extraordinary gathering of nuns, priests, rabbis, black and white, a range of political views, from all over the United States.” For her father, marching with Martin Luther King Jr. was both a political and a religious act. He said after the march: “For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying” (*Forward*, January 18).

#### ATHEIST PLATFORM:

Gretta Vosper, an outspoken atheist, is also an

**“While aristocracy-controlled religion was the opiate of the masses back then, corporate-controlled media is the opiate of the masses today.”**

— Travel writer Rick Steves (*Seattle Times*, January 3)

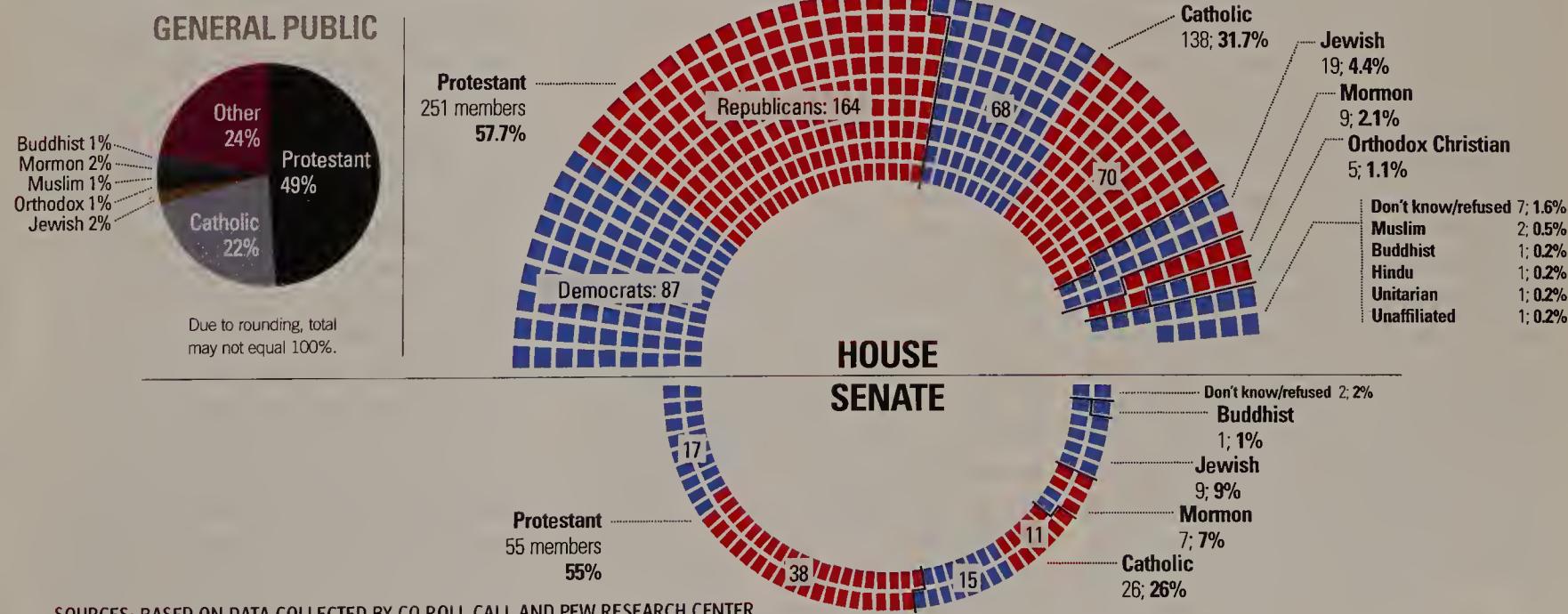
**“As stewards of God’s creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling.”**

— Pope Francis, in a speech delivered in the Philippines (Reuters)

ordained minister in the United Church of Canada and pastor of a small congregation in Toronto. Following the terrorist attacks in France, Vosper wrote a letter to the head of the denomination, suggesting that he should denounce all religion since it is the key source of global violence. The liberal denomination has taken no actions against her views, possibly because it does not want to draw more attention to her. David Ewart, a United Church pastor who has a column in the *United Observer*, says Vosper should do the right thing and leave the denomination (*Vancouver Sun*, January 20).

**SELF-SUFFICIENT?** Joni Ernst, the freshman senator from Iowa who gave the Republican response to President Obama’s State of the Union address, deplores government handouts. Her own extended family receives corn subsidies from the federal government. In her campaign she recalled how her home community came together during the 2009 economic crisis, saying that what they needed was for the federal government to get out of the way. She failed to report that in 2009 her own Iowa county received nearly \$9 million in federal farm subsidies. Nearly 20 percent of the residents in her county depend on food stamps (*LA Times*, January 23).

## THE RELIGIOUS MAKEUP OF THE 114<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS



# The shape of ashes

by Richard Lischer

**AMONG CHRISTIANS**, marking with ashes first occurred in the early Middle Ages as a sign of sorrow and repentance. Perhaps if we had lived then, with the Visigoths and the bubonic plague bearing down on us, when the slogan of the day was *memento mori* (“remember, you will die”) and a woman’s average life expectancy was 32 years, we too would have thought it was a splendid idea to show up at church once a year in sackcloth and ashes.

The symbol of ashes emerges from the depths of the earth, as old as fire, as bitter as shame, and as fundamental as death. When Abraham decides to bargain with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he says to God, “Who am I to bargain with you? I am nothing but dust and ashes.” After King David’s daughter, Tamar, is raped by her own brother, the scripture says she covered her head with ashes.

If you have ever carried the ashes of a fellow human being in one of those bronze boxes provided by the mortuary, you must admit that your first thought is not of repentance or shame or even God, but only mortality. You ask yourself, how has this beloved human, with whom I once shared laughter and tears, become nothing more than humus, the stuff of the earth?

Of course, if you love the earth, you tell yourself that this is all natural and good. In her novel *A Thousand Acres* Jane Smiley writes of the goodness of her farmland: “For millennia, water lay over the land. Untold generations of water plants, birds, animals, insects lived, shed bits of themselves, and died. . . . It all drifted down, lazily, in the warm, soupy water—leaves, seeds, feathers, scales, flesh, bones, petals, pollen—then mixed

with the saturated soil below and became, itself, soil. They were the soil, and the soil was the treasure.”

But before we can say “earth to earth, ashes to ashes” is good or God’s way, we have to believe it’s going to happen not to the other guy but to me. And this can be a hard sell. Most of my students belong to the demographic known as “the Invincibles,” the twentysomethings

Sometimes we mistake regret for repentance. It’s been said that regret is an old man’s disease, but what a shame to waste it on the elderly. Anyone can wallow in regret, but not everyone knows how to repent. Repentance entails a turning away from yourself (including your regrets) toward someone who has the authority to give the definitive answer to your entire life. With

## In Christ, even the chaos of ashes finds a form.

who are declining health insurance on a massive scale because they are never going to get sick and, consequently, are never going to die.

The point of Ash Wednesday is not to rub everyone’s nose in their own mortality. That would make us angels of death and not messengers of life. But we do have to make our way from the weight of ashes—in that little box—to what St. Paul calls the weight of glory, which is in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And there is a way.

The first station on the way from death to life is the “little death” of repentance. To repent is to admit, “I am nothing but dust and ashes,” but then to confess that the ashes represent more than my finite nature or my bad back or fretful dreams. Our ashes are the ways in which we have turned away from the will and love of God, followed our own will and pursued other loves. Luther said the human being is *incurvatus in se*, curved in upon itself. Our love is like a boomerang that, no matter how piously we aim it at others, always comes wheeling back to our own desires.

regret, you’re beating up on yourself and loving it. Repentance acknowledges the possibility of an answer that makes things right.

Repentance carries us toward the goal of reconciliation. A heart turned toward God is ready to turn toward others. Then it’s possible to forgive another human being—someone who has failed you, hated you, or betrayed you. It is possible, at least, to make something “right” with them. You may not continue in close communion, but something has been made right. The tremendous burden of hate or resentment has been lifted from your shoulders.

The hardest thing to make right is an act of lovelessness for which there is no remedy. It is over. There’s no one with whom to reconcile. Your arms are open, but no one’s arms are open to you. We may repent, and we may forgive, but because of death, distance, or circumstance, there’s no one there to forgive us back. We feel empty. We have fallen short of the definitive answer. Just then, Jesus

Richard Lischer teaches at Duke Divinity School.

stands in for the missing one or the action whose consequences cannot be called back. Jesus says, “You can’t reconcile with that person or community because they are dead to you, but I am alive. I stand in for them. Reconcile with me.”

When I was an intern during my seminary days, I served in a large church where the minister did about 40 funerals a year. One day he called me into his office and told me to take a funeral for him that afternoon. This made me uneasy. Apparently, I had skipped the class in which we learned how to bury people. I told him I didn’t know how.

He walked me over to the parish hall, where he took a piece of chalk and, like a coach drawing up a three-point play, drew the outline of an imaginary grave on the linoleum floor. He told me where to stand, how to act, and what to say. Then he took a mysterious vial from his inside pocket and said, “These are the ashes. When you come to the committal, pour these at the head of the casket and say, ‘Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.’ And one more thing: don’t be sloppy. Make sure you make the sign of the cross with the ashes.”

I might have asked, “Why not be sloppy with the ashes? That’s what death is all

about, isn’t it? A chaotic reunion with the soil, which itself is a chaos of comingled organisms on a planet named Earth.”

But in Christ, even the chaos of ashes finds a form. We don’t receive the ashes on Ash Wednesday only; we bring them to the altar every day. The little box we carry is our own. Only in Jesus are they gathered into the shape of the cross. Time and again, we bring them to him and then return to our mortal lives with something far better.

I can still hear my old mentor, as he pulled the vial out of his coat. “Here are the ashes. Remember, the shape—the *shape*—is essential. Don’t be sloppy.” 

M.Div.’s in debt

# Paying for seminary

by Sharon Miller and Christian Scharen

OVER THE PAST decade, seminaries of all types have witnessed declining enrollments, especially in M.Div. programs, the primary degree for those heading into parish ministry. Minority enrollment has shown a steady increase, with Hispanic enrollment leading the way (at a growth rate of 50 percent), but the overall trend is down. The slight growth in advanced degree programs (S.T.D., Ph.D., and Th.D.) and some master’s degree programs has also not compensated for the steady decline in enrollment for the M.Div. degree.

Distance education courses grew more than 100 percent over the decade, but enrollment at seminary extension centers began to decrease. It may be that distance education is pulling students away from extension centers. Time will tell if there is any net gain.

The past decade was difficult financially for most theological schools. Church support declined 24 percent from its high in 2006. Individual gifts

grew steadily until 2008 but dropped sharply when the recession hit.

One way that schools compensate for this loss of income is to become more dependent on student tuition, and indeed tuition and fees rose steadily over the decade—by as much as 68 percent, compared to a 27 percent increase in the Consumer Price Index and a 38 percent increase in the Higher Education Price Index.

Tuition at theological schools remains relatively low compared to other graduate professional degree programs, but this is small comfort for the majority of students who go into debt while they are in seminary.

Ballooning student debt is troubling not only for graduates but also for the schools that train them, as well as for the churches and other faith-based institutions that depend on their leadership. Rising theological student debt is mirrored in other programs for graduate professional education, yet it has

particular gravity in theological schools, where students’ sense of a divine call is paired with relatively low earning potential.

Auburn’s Center for the Study of Theological Education has been tracking theological student debt for 20 years, and data from the last decade bring some good news. Although average student debt at graduation is now close to \$40,000 and 12 percent of students borrow in excess of \$60,000, the rate of increase has slowed dramatically in the past decade. When adjusted for inflation, educational debt for M.Div. students who borrowed increased over \$13,000 between 1991 and 2001. In the following decade the increase was cut almost in half, to around \$7,000. The

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Sharon Miller is director for applied research at the Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary. Christian Scharen is Auburn Seminary’s vice president for applied research.

percentage of M.Div. students who borrowed remained the same, at 64 percent.

Some theological students are more apt to borrow than others, and some are apt to borrow significantly more money than others. Single students borrow more than married students (they don't have a second income to support them); women borrow more than men (partly because they are more likely to be single); single parents (who are likely to be women) borrow more as well; and African-American and Hispanic students borrow more than other students.

The highest levels of student debt are often held by older African-American females. Some of these women talk of thwarted dreams of ministry because educational debt has forced them into other careers.

Theological schools face a dilemma. Because of their reliance on tuition dollars, most schools are loath to turn away students, even if students have to fund their education by taking on significant debt. But if debt prevents students from

following their call to ministry and using the knowledge and experience they have gained in seminary, then theological schools will have failed to fulfill their mission.

Most schools now provide students with a wide array of online and interactive tools to assist them with budgeting and financial management, and some have developed new initiatives to help students minimize debt. These efforts seem to be paying off.

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has developed a program providing students with stewardship education, fund-raising experience, and a full tuition scholarship. Participating students are required to have a sponsoring church and to raise a minimum amount of money through donor pledges. Louisville Seminary has pledged to provide full tuition scholarships to all its master's degree students by the fall of 2015. Several Lutheran seminaries now provide financial coaches for students to help them with budgeting and

with managing congregational finances and stewardship.

Recognizing the pernicious effects of educational debt on those in ministry, Lilly Endowment has initiated a grant program to help schools address this issue. To date, the program is reaching 67 theological schools representing 27 denominations.

A school determined to minimize the debt of its students may need to make difficult decisions to spend less, find other revenues, or revamp programs to make it easier for students to work while studying. Schools that are already financially stable are better able to address these challenges.

Over the past decade, a few schools strengthened their net assets by 40 percent or more. These efforts had some common elements: the schools refused to operate on a deficit; they nurtured teamwork between board, administration, students, faculty, and staff; they built effective donor relationships; and they had vital strategic plans.

CC

## Theologian Lea Schweitz

# Scientists and seminarians

**LAST YEAR** the Templeton Foundation announced that it would give \$1.5 million in grants to ten seminaries for the purpose of bringing science into the theological curriculum. The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, which has received other Templeton grants in support of its Zygon Center for Religion and Science, has already launched an effort to embed science in the teaching of core subjects. Lea Schweitz is professor of theology at LSTC and director of the Zygon Center.

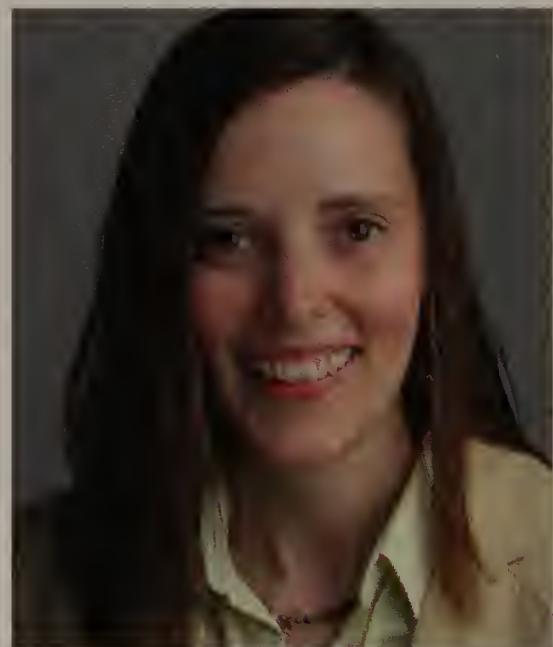
### Why did the seminary decide to embed science throughout the curriculum?

We sensed that familiarity with sci-

ence is necessary for emerging church leaders. The church is changing rapidly, and much of that change is due to the way that science and technology enter our daily lives.

When we proposed the project, it was a real challenge to find room in the curriculum amid all the other demands of the M.Div. program. Students didn't have time for electives. We are in the process of fashioning a new curriculum, but the principle remains: we've decided to embed a discussion of religion and science in the classes students are already taking.

This approach gives religion and science a kind of core effect across the cur-



COURTESY OF LUTHERAN SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CHICAGO

riculum. Students hear the refrain in many of their classes—Christian education, Bible, systematic theology. It is an organic part of their education.

The module approach also allows the faculty to model lifelong learning. If you are teaching Bible, you are probably not also a cognitive scientist. So faculty model an engagement with things beyond their expertise, and I think that is necessary for church leaders.

## What kinds of topics do you cover?

We went to faculty members to ask for their help in thinking about topics. We asked, "What kinds of questions have your students brought to you that you would like resources to address?"

One example comes from a biblical studies class. The professor asked, "Given scientific method and empirical modes of knowledge production, what can we say about miracles?"

We invited in a radiation oncologist, Gayle Woloschak, who is Greek Orthodox and has thought about the way she does science and reads the Gospels. (She is also associate director of the ZYGON Center.) She didn't offer final answers, but she opened a conversation that otherwise might not have happened.

## "We often have to reassure scientists that we want to hear their best science."

In a class on pastoral care, we did a module with a brain researcher at the Alzheimer's Association. The class typically talks about how a person's relationship with God is challenged and compromised when memory is challenged and compromised. The researcher was able to provide the latest research on the brain and aging: what happens to the aging brain and the bounds of memory.

In a Christian education class we brought in someone to talk about reading in a technological age—what happens with the brain when it engages texts, and what is different when the text is encountered on a screen rather than a printed page.

We have 16 of these modules. They cover a wide range of issues. Because we've been engaging questions of religion and science for a long time, we have a broad sense of what the needs of the church really look like.

## What is the ultimate goal of this effort?

In part, we are reacting against the wider culture that seems to think that religion and science are in conflict. We are eager to model different kinds of engagement.

Some studies suggest that one reason young people are not interested in church is because they perceive churches

to be dismissive of or in conflict with science. This poor relationship between religion and science is undercutting a generation of potential churchgoers. Church leaders of the future are going to need to be more responsive to scientific findings and questions than they are now.

We have seen that when you do science and religion well, you can bring out the best in one's theology. It can open a creative and transformative space.

## Can you give an example of science bringing out the best in theology?

In the conversation about memory and Alzheimer's, the research opened up a question about the nature of a self. In people suffering from Alzheimer's, one's deepest sense of self is eroded. You don't

have the same access to the "you" that you were. That opened up a question about whether one needs a narrative sense of self to be in a relationship with God. It opened a horizon of hope both theologically and pastorally.

## What are the challenges of integrating science into a seminary curriculum?

Many questions come up around hermeneutics: how to sensitively engage the authority of scripture and how to maintain contact with tradition—particularly Lutheran tradition, in our case. Another consistent challenge is the pace of science—staying on top of what is happening and being able to ask credible questions of the scientists who come to us.

## The discourse of science is so different from the discourse of theology. How do you get the two disciplines to talk to each other?

The temptation, of course, is to let religion and science run on parallel tracks. That is why it is so important to have working scientists in our dialogue.

One of the upcoming modules looks at artificial intelligence and human intelligence and how to understand the difference. One of the scientists I contacted

on this said, "I don't know why you think I have anything to say to you."

We often have to reassure scientists that we really want to hear their best science. And then we have to do the work of making the connection. There is a lot of translation and interpretive work that has to be done at our end. We try not to let the theology be too superficial or the science too popularized.

## What does a fruitful give-and-take look like?

When researchers come to us, they often get questions that they don't get in other contexts. Conversation with students of theology gives researchers a perspective and a different kind of context for their work. And sometimes there are practical benefits as well.

In the case of the Alzheimer's Association, the researcher said, they want to come because clergy and church leaders are often on the front lines of identifying the first signs of Alzheimer's.

## What do you hope your students will be able to do in ministry as a result of this training?

We think the training will be important in all kinds of areas. For example, in Christian education, we hope that these students will be able to engage issues of science for confirmation students and that they won't put up barriers unintentionally.

In the field of preaching, we want our students to be able to engage scripture and science in ways that are not simplistic. Scientific metaphors find their way into daily life, and we want students to be able to think about them critically and responsibly. And to speak prophetically about things like myths of genetic determinism—to respond with critical cultural engagement when assumptions are made.

In pastoral care, we want students to be able to walk with congregants through every stage of life and to know how to help a family seek help. They don't have to be the experts, but maybe they can help people know when the experts need to be called.

We'd like them to be able to think deeply about the role that technology is going to play in their ministries.



— Amy Frykholm

## Duke reverses stance on Muslim prayer

The Muslim call to prayer was broadcast from a small black loudspeaker perched on the steps of the Duke Chapel on Friday, January 16, as hundreds of students, mostly non-Muslim, gathered in support of the right of all students to pray publicly.

The gathering, replete with signs reading "Let us worship together" and "Please pray here," was quiet and peaceful and emerged spontaneously after Duke University officials the day before had abruptly reversed their decision to broadcast the Muslim *adhan*, or call to prayer, from the 210-foot bell tower atop the school's iconic chapel.

The plan had been to broadcast the Muslim call to prayer for about three minutes each Friday.

Instead, the call to prayer was issued from a portable public address system at the foot of the chapel, first in English, spoken by a woman, then in Arabic, recited in the familiar chant.

Speaking to the media prior to the 1 p.m. call to prayer, Michael Schoenfeld, Duke's vice president of public affairs and government relations, offered little insight into the cancellation besides saying there were "security concerns."

"The chapel is a very powerful and potent symbol of the university," Schoenfeld said. "When things happen involving the chapel, it means there has to be a very thoughtful and deliberative process for looking at that. That didn't happen in this case."

While Duke officials denied it, some suspected that behind the cancellation was the loud and forceful criticism voiced by Franklin Graham of Boone, North Carolina, who called on Duke alumni to withhold donations until the use of the chapel tower for Muslim prayer was suspended. Graham, who

leads the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, founded by his father, called the change "the right decision."

Duke was founded by Methodists, and its neo-Gothic chapel at the center of campus bills itself as a "Christian church of uniquely interdenominational character and purpose." But, as the dean of the chapel explained to reporters, the chapel also serves as a "moderator" and "convener" for other faith groups on campus, including Muslims.

"Our aim is to live into a generous hospitality toward different traditions," said Luke Powery, the dean of the chapel.

[Richard B. Hays, dean of Duke

Divinity School, said that he learned of the initial decision to broadcast the call to prayer after it was made public. He said that the intention of the chapel staff was to show "interfaith hospitality," but he noted that the chapel "was constructed with explicitly Christian iconography, and it has a long history of explicitly Christian worship."

He commented: "There are serious questions . . . about the wisdom and propriety" of the initial invitation. "Despite some common beliefs and traditions, Christianity and Islam stand in significant theological tension with one another . . . and the two traditions should not be symbolically conflated."

Duke has about 700 Muslim students among a student body of more than 14,000. In 2008, it became one of the first U.S. universities to hire a full-time Muslim chaplain. Shortly afterward, it began offering Friday *jumu'ah* prayers, which now take place in the basement of the chapel. A few years ago it opened the Center for Muslim Life in a converted ranch house on campus.

Imam Adeel Zeb, the current chaplain, acknowledged that the university has done more than many other schools have to make campus life more inviting to Muslim students.

"We're very proud to be here as Muslims at Duke," Zeb said.

He also told reporters there are no plans to reintroduce the bell tower call to prayer.

Omid Safi, director of the Duke Islamic Studies Center, wrote in an e-mail that he was deeply disappointed by the reversal.

"What could have been a celebration of Duke's commitment to our robust and diverse religious community has had to be adjusted due to the bigotry of Frank-



PHOTO BY SHUKE WONG (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE)

**REVERSAL:** Duke canceled plans to broadcast the Muslim call to prayer from the chapel tower.

lin Graham . . . and anonymous people leaving threatening and violent messages for members of the Duke community," he wrote. "I know that there are many inside of the Duke community and beyond who want to see us be better, be a loving and welcoming community in which all of us bring our religious particularity to the public arena."

First to show their support for the Muslim students on Friday were Duke Divinity School students, who gathered on the lawn in large numbers.

"Christians are called to be people of peace," said Sarah Martindell, a third-year graduate student, who drew a sign that said "Duke Divinity Supports You." "This demonstrates our solidarity with our Muslim neighbors."

Many others joined in, including a smattering of students from other universities. Sarah Zamamiri, a Muslim who recently graduated from the nearby University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said nothing would have stopped her from showing her support to her Muslim brothers and sisters.

"I felt really disappointed," she said of Duke's decision. "What Duke did was to amplify the whole conversation of diversity and inclusion." —Yonat Shimron and Mariam Sobh, Religion News Service

## Historian and theologian Marcus Borg dies at 72

Marcus J. Borg, who for a generation helped popularize intense debates about the historical Jesus and the veracity and meaning of the New Testament, died January 21. He was 72 and had been suffering from a prolonged illness.

Borg emerged in the 1980s as academics and theologians were bringing new energy to the so-called quest for the historical Jesus.

Alongside scholars such as John Dominic Crossan, Borg was a leader in the Jesus Seminar, which brought a skeptical eye to the scriptures and in particular to supernatural claims about Jesus' miracles and his resurrection from the dead. Borg tended to view Jesus as a Jewish prophet and teacher who was a

product of the religious ferment of first-century Judaism.

But while Borg questioned the Bible, he never lost his passion for the spiritual life or his faith in God as "real and a mystery," as he put it in his 2014 memoir *Convictions: How I Learned What Matters Most*, the last of his more than 20 books.

"Imagine that Christianity is about loving God," he wrote. "Imagine that it's not about the self and its concerns, about 'what's in it for me,' whether that be a blessed afterlife or prosperity in this life."

Borg was the youngest of four children, born March 11, 1942, in Minnesota and raised in a Lutheran family. He attended Concordia College in Minnesota, where he majored in philosophy and political science.

He remained fascinated by the New Testament and accepted a fellowship to do graduate work at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he delved deeply into the Jewish background of the Gospels and Jesus of Nazareth. Borg then went on to further studies at Oxford and taught at various universities in the Midwest on his return to the United States.

In 1979 he joined the faculty at Oregon State University and taught religion there until his retirement in 2007.

Borg gravitated to the Episcopal Church, which was his home for much of his life. His wife, Marianne, is an Episcopal priest and former canon at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon, where Borg frequently lectured and was given the title of canon theologian. With characteristic humor, he said his wife informed him that *canon* means "big shot."

Borg's 1987 book *Jesus: A New Vision* launched him to prominence. He summarized and explained recent New Testament scholarship for a popular audience while presenting Jesus as a social and political prophet of his time who was driven by his relationship with God. Borg viewed this relationship as more important than traditional Christian beliefs about Jesus.

In subsequent books, three of them cowritten with Crossan, Borg continued to press and expand on those ideas, becoming a hero to some Christians and a target for others.



**PASSION FOR JESUS:** Borg helped popularize debates about the historical Jesus and the meaning of Jesus' ministry.

Borg loved to debate but was no polemicist, and over the years he maintained strong friendships with those who disagreed with him, developing a reputation as a gracious and generous scholar in a field and a profession not always known for those qualities.

For example, Borg coauthored a 1999 book, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, with N. T. Wright, an Anglican biblical scholar who took a more orthodox view of the Gospels. Wright also recommended many of Borg's books and lectured alongside him on occasion.

[Though the two disagreed on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, for example, Wright told the *New York Times* that he and Borg shared "a deep and rich mutual affection and friendship."]

Frederick W. Schmidt Jr., professor of spiritual formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, counted Borg as "a cherished friend."

"Marcus shaped the conversation about Jesus, the church, and scripture in powerful ways," Schmidt wrote on his blog after hearing of Borg's death. "I came to different conclusions about a number of issues, but Marc was always incisive, tenacious, thoughtful, and unfailingly gracious."

During a question-and-answer period with parishioners at one event, someone asked Borg, "But how do you know that you're right?"

Borg paused and responded: "I don't know. I don't know that I'm right."

—David Gibson, Religion News Service

# Egypt president Sisi bans offensive images, urges religious moderation

Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi issued a decree January 13 allowing his government to ban any foreign publications it deems offensive to religion. The move came days after his foreign minister joined the Paris solidarity march in support of *Charlie Hebdo*'s right to offend.

This and other contradictions lie at the heart of his approach to religion, 18 months after he overthrew an Islamist president in the most populous Arab country.

Sisi's so-called religious revolution is "part and parcel of a broader and more traditional statist project," said Michael Hanna, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation think tank. "This is why both religious expression and religious immoderation are to be tightly controlled, as they are understood as potential sources of instability that could disrupt public order."

Sisi, a former army general, began the year with a call for a "religious revolution" in Egypt, an attempt to position himself at the vanguard of moderate Islam.

His professed goal is to purge the religion of extremist strands of intolerance and violence that fuel groups like al-Qaeda and the self-described Islamic State.

"It's inconceivable that the thinking that we hold most sacred should cause the entire Islamic world to be a source of anxiety, danger, killing, and destruction for the rest of the world," he said in a speech to clerics at Al-Azhar University, the highest seat of Sunni learning in Egypt. He called on Egypt's imams to conduct a "truly enlightened" review of how religious texts were read and propagated.

Sisi has also called for religious toleration, and he became the first Egyptian president to attend a Coptic Christmas Eve mass. It was a popular move among Christians, to whom Sisi's authoritarianism represents a bulwark against the return of the Muslim Brotherhood.



**UNPRECEDENTED APPEARANCE:** Egypt's president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (2nd from right) speaks to Coptic Pope Tawadros II as he addresses the congregation during Christmas Eve mass at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo. Sisi became the first Egyptian president to attend a Coptic Christmas Eve mass.

Sisi is seeking to impose change through the state, using official religious institutions like the 1,000-year-old Al-Azhar University, with backing from the police and the judiciary, which is secular but strongly influenced by Islam.

Since Mohamed Morsi was ousted as president in July 2013, his followers have been depicted as terrorists and subjected to mass arrests, and Brotherhood preachers have largely been purged from the country's mosques.

"[Sisi's] is a conservative vision, just not a radical one," said Nathan Brown, a longtime Egypt scholar based at George Washington University. "It assigns a strong role for the state in protecting what are seen as the rights of the community and public morality in general."

The prosecution of those deemed to have insulted religion—a practice that picked up after the 2011 revolution and attracted stinging criticism during Morsi's rule—has also continued apace since the popularly backed 2013 coup.

Egypt's penal code allows the law to get tough on dissenters from the majority Sunni population, including Shi'ite Muslims and Bahá'ís, who face harassment by security forces.

Atheists also tread a dangerous path in Egypt: on January 12, a court sentenced 21-year-old student Karim al-

Banna to three years in jail for professing his atheism via social media and for allegedly insulting Islam. He was one of at least six people tried for religious defamation in the space of as many months. —Louisa Loveluck, *The Christian Science Monitor*

## Ferguson pastor, scholar address ongoing struggle against racism

Pastor F. Willis Johnson captured national attention last August after Mike Brown, an unarmed teenager, was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri. Johnson was photographed talking to an 18-year-old protester. He embraced the protester and moved him out of the way of police.

Since then, he has continued to engage with young activists, who remind him of the biblical figure of David.

"Every generation is challenged by situations and circumstances that are insanely intimidating and gigantic in scope," he said. "There are Davids all around us. They are young men and women who have been anointed and prepared."

These youth are not necessarily the

ones in church confirmation classes, he said, yet they are the leaders of their generation.

"David is the youth that's pressed to the margins of society," Johnson said. "He ain't scared of tear gas or rubber bullets."

Johnson is pastor of Wellspring Church, a United Methodist congregation located near the Ferguson police department. He spoke in Chicago January 18 at an event sponsored by the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church.

"Too many of us in church are giant takers," Johnson said. "But I want you to understand there are some young folk, there are some young-at-heart folk, there are some frustrated folk, there are angry folk ... and they are also divinely directed and courageously convinced enough that they are willing, if need be, to stand and die before the giant."

Since it was established in 2011, his church has been working on building connections between residents and municipal leaders, and they have increased their efforts since August.

Johnson was interviewed by National Public Radio in August, and among the listeners was Sally Dyck, presiding bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church. Dyck contacted Johnson to say she was praying for him and invited him to Chicago.

Johnson was joined at the event by Pamela Lightsey, a scholar, activist, and associate dean at Boston University's

School of Theology, who has visited Ferguson several times.

Lightsey lamented the fact that so many congregations are still segregated and are not talking about racism. She sees a role for liturgy to confront racism at the congregational level.

"I believe that the foundation of systemic racism is pride," she said. —Celeste Kennel-Shank, *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*



PHOTO BY PATRICK DONOVAN (VIA CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE)

## French Jews look to emigrate amid rising anti-Semitism

On a gloomy winter afternoon, a group of mothers chatted as they waited outside a primary school for their children to emerge. But it was not a typical Parisian scene: soldiers armed with automatic weapons patrolled the surroundings.

"I'm scared," said Vanessa Ganum, who came to pick up her daughter at Beth Hanna, a Jewish school.

After the murder of four Jews on January 9 at a kosher supermarket, many in France's Jewish community are thinking of emigrating, joining a rising tide of their coreligionists who have fled increasing anti-Semitism in recent years. Others hope that the attack, and its link to the earlier massacre at the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, will finally force ordinary French people to face up to the fact that their fellow citizens commit more anti-Semitic crimes than any other European country.

"Now that France's core values have been attacked, people see that Jews are only the first target on a longer list," said Yonathan Arfi, deputy president of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions. "I hope they will see that they have a responsibility for the problem we face."

France has the largest Jewish population outside Israel and the United States, more than 500,000 people. The community has been subjected in recent months to a mounting wave of anti-Semitic attacks, including arson and vandalism against Jewish schools, cemeteries, and grocery stores, as well as the recent rape of a Jewish woman and gunfire directed at a Paris synagogue.

**RISING FEARS:** Shoppers browse in a store in the Jewish quarter of Paris. An increasing number of Jews are emigrating from France—7,000 did so in 2014.

In the first seven months of last year, the Jewish Community Protection Service reported 527 such acts, nearly double the number for the same period in 2013.

"We have the feeling that things are going downhill ever faster," Arfi said.

Although anti-Semitism still colors the thinking of some traditional supporters of far-right parties such as the National Front, police lay most of the recent anti-Semitic violence at the door of radical Islamist young men.

Amedy Coulibaly, who attacked the kosher market, was not the first such gunman to kill several French Jews. In 2012, Mohammed Merah shot and killed three Jewish children and one of their teachers at a school in the southern city of Toulouse.

Nearly 7,000 Jews left France for good last year, according to figures from the Jewish Agency for Israel; that is twice as many as emigrated in 2013. A poll last year by Siona, a French Jewish group, found that 74 percent of respondents had thought of emigrating, one-third of them because of rising anti-Semitism.

Sitting in a kosher bakery not far from the Beth Hanna school that serves as a meeting place for local Jews, plumber David Cohen said that his friends and neighbors have felt "for some time" that their future is not in France.

"France is a boat that is sinking," he said, and he is considering following his parents, who emigrated to Israel two years ago.

The French government has addressed the scale of anti-Semitism.

"The awakening of anti-Semitism is a symptom of a crisis of democracy, a crisis



**PULPIT CHALLENGE:** F. Willis Johnson (left), pastor of Wellspring Church in Ferguson, Missouri, preaches, "It's not your fault, but it is your fight" to a gathering in Chicago at the invitation of Sally Dyck (right), presiding bishop of the United Methodist Northern Illinois Conference.

of the Republic," said Prime Minister Manuel Valls in a speech to parliament. "The national community . . . did not perhaps react sufficiently" to the recent wave of anti-Semitic incidents. "We were not indignant enough."

Shimon Samuels, head of the Paris office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, sees the targeting of Jews as part of a wider danger.

"Government leaders are saying all the right things," he said, "but now it has to filter down." —Peter Ford and Sara Miller Llana, *The Christian Science Monitor*

## British Jews concerned about future in Europe

More than half of British Jews (58 percent) question whether they have a future in Britain or Europe, according to a survey conducted by the Campaign Against Antisemitism.

The survey included 2,200 British Jews from different parts of the country, where the Jewish population is 280,000.

"Britain is at a tipping point," said Gideon Falter, chairman of CAA. "Unless anti-Semitism is met with zero tolerance, it will grow, and British Jews will increasingly question their place in this country."

Fellow campaigner Jonathan Sacerdoti said rising anti-Semitism in Britain and Europe has made Jews afraid.

Dave Rich, a spokesman for Community Security Trust, which looks after the security of British Jews, said that extra police and volunteer patrols are protecting synagogues.

In mid-January, France had 10,000 troops guarding synagogues, railway stations, airports, and other sites. Nearly half the soldiers—about 4,700—were assigned to protect France's 717 Jewish schools.

Laura Janner-Klausner, senior rabbi in the Movement for Reform Judaism, disagreed with the survey's conclusions.

"It doesn't match day-to-day realities," she said. "Britain is a fantastic place. . . . It offers all religions and minorities freedom. Britain is one of the best countries in the world for Jews." —Trevor Grundy, Religion News Service

## The Layman, critical Presbyterian voice, ceases print publication

The newspaper published by the Presbyterian Lay Committee, *The Layman*, ceased printing at the end of 2014, but the PLC will continue to provide information and resources online and plans to increase its social media presence.

The shift, which came as part of a strategic planning process, includes "refocusing on the priesthood of all believers," said Carmen Fowler LaBerge, committee president, with "the desire to help laypeople live out the Christian faith in every aspect of their life, especially in their work."

More than 90,000 people received the final print edition. The newspaper, a prominent conservative voice in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), had no subscribers or advertisers. Donations from individuals and congregations are its sole source of income.

The committee will continue to send print material to its 10,000 donors.

"It's not going to look like *The Layman* has historically looked," LaBerge said. "The cost of that particular presentation doesn't make a whole lot of sense in terms of staff investment and energy."

The PLC has been offering news online, for free, with a small fraction of articles making it into the print edition, she said. In recent years, the PLC has published print and online resources on church property law for congregations leaving the PCUSA.

"The constituency of *The Layman* has also changed pretty dramatically," she said. A third of its readers are affiliated with other Presbyterian denominations, such the Covenanted Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.

LaBerge foresees that more congregations will affiliate with other denominations and that "there will be disaffected people who remain in the PCUSA

long-term . . . who do not agree with the choices, standards, positions of the PCUSA. They will need a collective presence of some kind."

The PLC will provide that presence. Its other role will be in activities such as church planting, she said. However, the PLC is not changing its stances, such as opposition to same-sex marriage.

"I think people will be surprised that the Lay Committee isn't either going away or just going to be hair-on-fire, screaming mad about everything," LaBerge said.

The PLC began in 1965 with a group of lay leaders who objected to the Presbyterian confession eventually approved by the United Presbyterian Church. It began publishing *The Layman* in 1968.

Robert Bohl recalls that when he was PCUSA moderator in 1994, the General Assembly called for a special committee to meet with the PLC in an attempt at reconciliation. At the end of the year, after half a dozen meetings, Bohl recommended ceasing the effort.

"You can't be reconciled with someone who doesn't want to be reconciled," he said. "We all are improved by having authentic critics, but their type of journalism was not constructive."

Jack Haberer, pastor of Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church in Naples, Florida, and former editor of the independent magazine the *Presbyterian Outlook*, said

*The Layman* sometimes saw "denominational leaders as enemies to be thwarted. The hard, critical ad hominem that they've done have from my perspective often either exaggerated or simply misrepresented those they have criticized."

He noted, though, that "under Carmen's leadership that tone has softened markedly."

He said that as a pastor he would consider sharing resources from the PLC with congregants.

"The biggest point of difference between me and the Lay Committee is that I totally oppose churches leaving the denomination," he said. "The world knows we're disciples by the way we love one another, not by the way we separate and fight." —Celeste Kennel-Shank, *CHRISTIAN CENTURY*



Carmen Fowler LaBerge

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN LAY COMMITTEE

# People



■ **Gina Campbell**, an ordained United Methodist minister, is canon precentor at Washington National Cathedral and has participated in leading services there for nearly five years. But she was not allowed to preside over the Eucharist until January 25.

The cathedral, which considers itself a “house of prayer for all people,” is an Episcopal congregation, and only recently did the Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church come to an “interim eucharistic sharing” agreement. The January 25 service commemorated the new relationship between the two churches.

“The sacramental part of my vocation—which, for me, has always been the deepest way I have experienced assurance of my calling—can now live with full expression,” Campbell said in a statement. “By God’s grace, and with human cooperation, the brokenness of Christ’s body continues to heal.”

Gary Hall, dean of Washington National Cathedral, noted in a statement that Campbell can now also preside at baptisms at the cathedral.

“As the cleric directing our worship, Gina has brought depth and skill to the crafting of cathedral services,” Hall said. “It is a gift to us that she will now be fully authorized to stand at the table as a full participant in liturgical leadership.”

■ **Syngman Rhee**, 83, a former North Korean refugee and leader for more than five decades in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and in ecumenical circles, died January 14 in Atlanta shortly after being diagnosed with an aggressive cancer.

Rhee was born in 1931 in Pyong-

yang, now part of North Korea, to a Presbyterian family.

“My father was a pastor who was martyred in prison in the fall of 1950,” Rhee said in an interview with Faith and Leadership at Duke Divinity School in 2013. “After that, my mother insisted that her two sons—me, at 19, and my 17-year-old brother—go to South Korea as refugees, because she feared the same thing would happen to us.”

They walked for ten days and joined the South Korean marines. Rhee used a Korean expression for “second-chance life” to describe what he received.

“In a real sense, as a Korean marine during the war, there was no particular reason that I survived, whereas my comrades perished,” he said. His goal became “wanting to be faithful to the given opportunities each day and each year.”

He immigrated to the United States in 1956 and earned degrees at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, Yale Divinity School, and Chicago Theological Seminary.

“I became a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) minister to follow in my father’s footsteps and to carry on the task that he was unable to complete,” said Rhee, who was ordained in 1960.

He served as a congregational pastor and as coordinator for Middle East Missions for the United Presbyterian Church. As a campus minister in the 1960s at the University of Louisville, he was active in the civil rights movement. That experience inspired his work for reconciliation between North and South Koreans, he told members of Columbia Theological Seminary, where he was visiting professor in the practice of global leadership development at the time of his death. Rhee led the rebuilding of churches in North Korea and coordinated Presbyterian mission work in East Asia.

He served as president of the National Council of Churches from 1992 to 1993 and as moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) from 2000 to 2001.

“I watched him holding together a great diversity of people,” said John Buchanan, CHRISTIAN CENTURY editor

and publisher, recalling Rhee’s work with the NCC. “Syngman had a moral authority about him. I think it came out of his journey and experience with violence and tragedy.”

Buchanan, who served as moderator of the PCUSA a few years before Rhee, also remembered Rhee’s handling of Presbyterian debates. “Syngman was magnificent at getting people to dial back their anger and talk to one another,” he said.

Rhee taught mission and evangelism and Asian theology and served as director of the Asian-American Ministry and Mission Center at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, from 1998 to 2011.

Having come to the United States in the mid-1950s, he “experienced all the history of the church’s decline,” he said in the interview with Faith and Leadership. “Unfortunately, I think mainline denominations were so involved in bearing the fruits of our faith that they neglected nurturing the roots of our faith—basic things like the importance of scripture, devotion, and worship.”

■ **Katherine Hancock Ragsdale** will not continue as dean and president of Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, after her contract expires at the end of June.

Ragsdale said she had asked EDS trustees “if possible, to expedite the process of naming a successor so that I may explore new opportunities. Of course I will do everything I can to ensure a smooth transition.”

Ragsdale became dean in 2009 after the institution sold off \$33 million in property to resolve some of its financial challenges, including outstanding debt.

In a statement, trustees praised Ragsdale for honoring “our tradition of being a respected and progressive center for study and spiritual formation for lay and ordained leaders.”

In 2013, Ragsdale received a vote of “no confidence” by faculty after she proposed changes to the traditional residential seminary model. —Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Religion News Service



PHOTO BY MYUNG JIN CHAE / COURTESY COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



PHOTO COURTESY OF EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

# LIVING BY The Word

**February 22, First Sunday in Lent**

**Genesis 9:8-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22**

**LENT'S ORIGINS** are as a time of preparation for baptism. The readings for this first Sunday of the season ring out the theme of baptismal covenant, with the covenant made to Noah interpreted in 1 Peter as the covenant of baptism. Why does God choose covenant—faithful relationship extended over time and space—as the means of salvation?

A scientific view of the cosmos may be helpful here. For much of Christian history, we've regarded the creation as a brief prelude to the *real* story, the several thousand years of “salvation history.” But evolution offers a different lens for seeing God's act of creating: it extends over time and space for billions of years. This week's Genesis reading—the first instance of covenant in the Bible—seems to support the latter view. It repeatedly emphasizes God's promise of non-destruction to all creatures; its perspective is broader than just humankind alone. And it places salvation history in the context of God's wider creative activity—as does much of the New Testament (e.g., John 1:1-18 and Col. 1:15-20).

I believe that God chooses covenant as the means of salvation for humankind because God's creativity is still evolving us as a species. We continue to be made and remade as human beings—as individuals and as a species of creatures, the one made in God's image—precisely through God's faithful relationship with us over time and space. Covenant is the means not just of God's salvation but also of God's creativity.

The anthropology of René Girard has become a primary interpretive lens for me. Girard's mimetic theory combines a scientific, evolutionary approach to understanding human nature with the Bible's anthropological revelation—a revelation that climaxes in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the one that Christians claim is both truly divine (revealed theology) and truly human (revealed anthropology). Girard's work can renew our understanding of why it is necessary to have both these revelations of God combined in the same person. The two work in tandem. A revelation of our anthropology is necessary for us to comprehend how wrong we often are in our theology.

The Noah story provides an excellent example. Is the God at the beginning of the story, who tries to solve the problem of human violence (Gen. 6:11) with a violent genocide, truly the same God at the end, who apparently repents of it and promises never to do it again? Or does the dual revelation of Jesus Christ show us that these are really two different gods? The true God—revealed in Jesus to be non-

violent—is distinguished from the false gods of our human evolution, false gods typified in flood myths from across the globe.

I believe this is the impulse behind 1 Peter's interpretation of the flood. Christ suffered for our sins once and for all, says 1 Peter, “in order to bring you to God” (3:18). Christ's suffering reveals to us that gods who command genocidal floods are false gods—the gods who in every culture command a good and sacred violence to stop the flood of human violence. But the God who places a rainbow covenant in the sky, as a promise never to try to solve the problem of violence by inflicting more violence, is the God we meet in Christ. If we don't learn to see the god who slaughters everyone in the flood as a false god of human culture, then we risk losing the revelation of God in Christ—the God revealed in the rainbow promise.

In short, covenant is an ongoing relationship for the sake of getting to know who God truly is, of being brought to God. Christ came to fulfill that covenant. The God revealed by baptism in the death and resurrection of Christ offers a startling alternative to the gods of our origins. The human answer to violence is to inflict more violence to stop it. God's answer to this is to suffer violence on the cross—showing violence to be impotent compared to God's life-giving power of love on Easter, and enacting the healing power of forgiveness in the giving of the Spirit. In the cross and resurrection, God saves us from the flood of human violence that threatens to destroy us.

There's a reason that flood stories are so universal in human culture. Since our beginnings as a species, we've feared wiping ourselves out through our own contagious violence. Elements of the Bible's flood story bear the same mythic understanding—a god using a flood as a projection of the age-old human answer of violence. We need to learn to read the flood story through the eyes of the God revealed in the rainbow promise, the God revealed in Jesus.

So where in the world is salvation? Why is the world still so filled with violence? God's way is not to use counterforce, so God's creative transformation does not happen with the speed or methods we might choose. That's why the means of our salvation is a covenant centered in the Christ event—a baptismal covenant extended over time and space, an ongoing relationship for the sake of being brought to God. In this era of technology powerful enough to destroy us in a flood of violence, it's growing more urgent that we understand this. The Lenten journey of baptismal covenant helps us rehearse the long journey of God's faithful commitment to remake us—from creatures living in the death-dealing image of our own violence to beloved sons and daughters reformed in the life-giving image of God's creative compassion.

# Reflections on the lectionary

**March 1, Second Sunday in Lent**  
Mark 8:31–38

**WHY DO PEOPLE** get married? In our culture, the most common response to this question is, “For love!” In other times and places, it’s had more to do with the socioeconomic relations between two families. A Christian answer might go something like this: we belong to a covenant God who calls us to live in covenant with each other, covenants such as marriage.

When you live in faithful relationship with someone for years that stretch into decades, you share just about everything. In a marriage founded on trust and love, this can range from the most ordinary activities down to your innermost thoughts and feelings. In getting to know my life partner, I learn both about myself and about what it means to be human. This is a never-ending process filled with trial and error. You know how it goes: just when you think you have a loved one figured out, the loved one surprises you again. So you can’t proceed in this journey without love and forgiveness.

That’s why God is a covenant God: to undergird all our human covenants with the love and forgiveness we need. From the beginning, God offered human beings a covenant life as a foundation for our living together in peace. But from the beginning we blew it. We thought we could know these things on our own. The serpent said we could know good and evil if we ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. Paradise was lost.

But instead of giving up on us, God began anew and chose Abraham and Sarah to make a covenant that is the foundation for all others. It is in choosing Abraham and Sarah and their descendants that God seeks to have a conversation over the years, extending not just decades but centuries. Through God’s ongoing conversation with the descendants of Abraham and Sarah—and I believe we should add Abraham and Hagar, to include our Muslim sisters and brothers—God helps us to better know both ourselves and what it means to be human.

In Jesus, a descendant of Abraham and Sarah, we are able to see fully and completely both God and ourselves. We learn who God is and what it means to be human. And though it has been centuries, I don’t think we yet understand. On God’s side of the covenant in Christ Jesus, there is no error, only pure truth of both divinity and humanity. But on our side of the covenant, there is still trial and error—just like in our human covenant relationships. So the conversation continues. We are still learning what it means to be human, even as we learn who God truly is.

Our Gospel reading offers an example. A few verses earlier, Peter has gotten it right by proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. But in this passage Peter also shows himself to be wrong—trial and error. He assumes that as God’s servant, the Messiah is here to bring God’s wrath down upon God’s enemies. But Jesus goes on to say how the wrath of the Romans will come down upon *him* and he will be crucified. For Peter, this surely can’t happen if Jesus is truly God’s Messiah. Peter thinks he knows who God is, but the conversation-made-flesh-in-history will prove him wrong.

In Jesus the Messiah, we find out that God is not wrath, but love. God takes the wrath of our law upon himself in Jesus on Good Friday and turns it into love and forgiveness on Easter. That’s why Good Friday is good—not because of our wrath, but because God’s powerful love is strong enough to turn wrath into love and new life.

What about all those passages we interpret to say that God is wrath? We can chalk that up in part to our slowness to understand our centuries-long conversation with God. What we see and hear as God’s wrath is actually God’s love in pain when witnessing *our* wrath heaped upon each other. Love doesn’t mean all is well in the world. Love gives choices—and

## From the beginning, God offered humans a covenant life.

we so often continue to choose the path of wrath that leads to broken covenants, estrangement, and death.

So where does this leave us? How can the true God of love ever get through to us when we continue projecting our wrath onto our gods? The answer: our covenant God never gives up on us. In infinite patience and love, God continues the centuries-long conversation with us that we might finally hear and understand who God is, and who we are created to be. It took God choosing Abraham and Sarah to start anew. And even with much trial and error among their descendants, the conversation finally became flesh in Jesus Christ, lived out as the suffering servant who calls us to take up our cross and follow him.

Christ’s followers have also endured many centuries of trial and error in this conversation, this covenant. Yet again, as always, God starts anew.

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*The author is Paul Nuechterlein, senior pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Portage, Michigan.*

# The story we share

by Bob Zurinsky

**IT'S TAKEN ME** these first four weeks just to get comfortable with what's going on here. I didn't know other Christians could think this differently!"

I was sitting across the table from one of the students who help run our campus's worship ministry. In this role he works with a group of 11 other students—people from Christian faith traditions representing a spectrum of convictions on doctrinal and social issues. This student wanted to talk about ways his religious convictions had been challenged since he'd arrived at school.

Seattle Pacific is a Christian university of over 4,200 students; most of the undergraduate students are women, and 32 percent are ethnic minority students. We're an open enrollment school: we have no faith statement to sign and no expectations about religious practice. Yet over 80 percent of our undergraduates claim a strong personal Christian faith. Although their faith orientations tend toward mainstream evangelicalism, the students come from more than 50 different denominations. Because of our nonsectarian approach to Christian education, we attract students who are conservative to progressive, Protestant to Catholic to Orthodox.

In my campus work I walk alongside students as they engage their faith and their faith questions. I love my work. But the ministry is tricky; the work of spiritual formation requires creativity and imagination because baffling challenges emerge from the very thing that enriches our experience together: religious diversity.

In most of the churches the students come from, worshipers who disagree with a pastor's theology or are uncomfortable with worship shop around for another church. They usually choose a place that's comfortable, frequently a place where they find people like themselves. One student, for example, refused to attend a local church because the pastor did not explicitly address substitutionary atonement in each and every sermon. And one young woman loved almost everything about a church she visited but decided not to return because she didn't appreciate the clapping. Such is the self-selecting Christian culture that many of our students grew up in. At SPU they begin to realize that a high level of religious diversity is being accepted and encouraged.

A young man raised in a mainline church was talking with a new friend about events of the past weekend. The friend talked excitedly about the opportunity he'd had to pray over someone and see him freed from demonic possession. The other

assumed that this was a joke and instinctively laughed out loud, then quickly realized he was at an awkward boundary between varieties of Christian experience. The boundary would become his "new normal" at college.

Social psychologist Christena Cleveland says that while most people are willing to admit the need for reconciliation across racial, gender, and socioeconomic lines, they don't think that way about theological divides. Religious positions touch

## Can a school proclaim the gospel in a way that allows for many voices?

the core of our identity. When we're pressed to admit the validity of multiple viewpoints, many of us feel as if we're turning our back on God. We may also avoid the vulnerability we feel when we engage with others.

A heated debate took place in a residence hall between a progressive Mennonite and a student committed to the principles of gender complementarity. For each the issue of gender roles was an integral feature of her understanding of the gospel. Each felt that her status as a disciple of Christ was under attack by the very presence of the other within the community.

**I**n this setting, a campus pastor works to build community and discipleship. He asks, "Who are we as a community? What kind of communal identity should we proclaim?" Some institutions address this tension by charting a course into more relativistic places, but they run the risk of erasing their Christian convictions. Others respond by shoring up their constituencies along fundamentalist lines.

At SPU we're determined to find a third way. According to its faith statement, SPU strives to be "historically orthodox, clearly evangelical, distinctively Wesleyan, and genuinely ecumenical." This identity requires us to remain grounded in our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, but to do so in a way that

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*Bob Zurinsky is assistant director of university ministries at Seattle Pacific University.*



McKinley Hall on the campus of Seattle Pacific University

makes room for many voices. In required theology courses, Reformed students converse with skeptical agnostics, while young adults who haven't experienced faith outside of their nondenominational home churches explore the gift of liturgy. For some students it's a confusing time; for most it's an invigorating one.

Dissecting faiths is easy. How do we offer a unifying vision of the Christian life to students who might never discover a doctrinal common ground with other students? For us the answer is this: we tell the Christian story.

Telling the story doesn't mean ignoring doctrine or glossing over the ethical and social issues that divide us. But it does mean grounding ourselves first and foremost in a narrative. This approach follows the example of some of the brighter lights of the early church and the ecumenical councils that gave us the creeds. The wisdom of these mothers and fathers in faith reveals that unity doesn't require conformity to some particular account of creation or philosophy of atonement. What binds us together is a story that describes our common future and the one who secures it.

A narrative approach to spiritual formation acknowledges that human beings are intrinsically storied creatures. We are unique in our ability to understand life as a sequence of events. We know that our selves are located in a matrix of past-present-future and that both what we remember and what we anticipate shapes our experience of life in the present.

This means that our identity is a function of the story we perceive ourselves to be a part of. This is true at all levels of personal and community experience. My understanding of the story of my family shapes the way I experience and participate in relationships, just as my understanding of the narrative "America" shapes the way I experience and participate in the

world. Similarly, my understanding of the story of God and the universe shapes the way I experience and participate in life at all levels. The distinctive contribution of Christianity is its story. When I know that story I can imagine where my life is headed and live toward that reality.

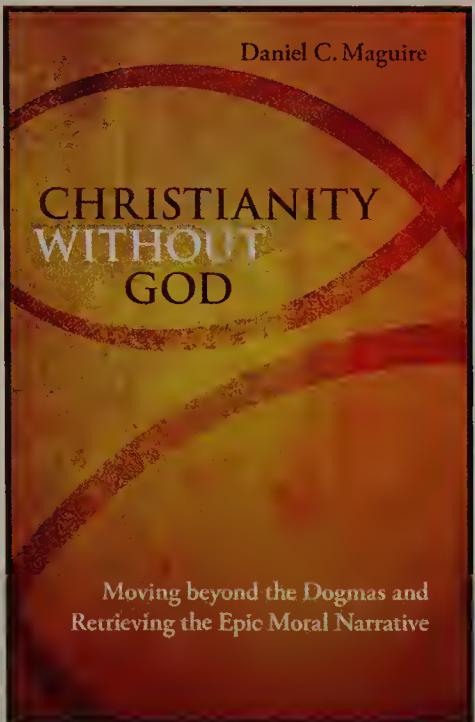
Yes, I know that human history is the story of metanarratives gone wrong and that scholars have spent the last century critiquing the possibility of a universal plotline. There is great power for good or evil in the stories we tell, and one needs to be very careful in how one tells the Christian story.

Yet when I listen carefully to my own heart and pay attention to the longings of the students sitting in my office, I'm convinced that we are all searching for the story that frames our lives and offers us direction.

I'm on a quest to discover a way of telling the story that meets these criteria: faithful to our Christian tradition, "good news" for all people, and in an outline broad enough to make room for different convictions and perspectives. I'm convinced that if we articulate it carefully and humbly, a metanarrative can offer life and hope instead of domination and oppression.

I've been influenced in this approach by reading the work of Jürgen Moltmann and contemplating the role of imagination in understanding the eschatological future of creation, as viewed through the lens of Christ's death and resurrection. Both students and professors at SPU have been influenced by N. T. Wright's *Surprised by Hope*, which resonates deeply with our Wesleyan instinct to seek God's redeeming action in broken parts of our lives and world. Both Moltmann and Wright outline a story of hope that helps us imagine our place in the unfinished script of salvation history.

How does a narrative approach to Christian identity forma-



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tion play out in campus life? We haven’t yet discovered the final answer to that question, but I suspect that one of the most natural and historic venues for a community’s induction into its story is the worship service, as James K. A. Smith argues in his *Cultural Liturgies* trilogy.

Several years ago we made a shift in how we approach worship services on campus. Instead of offering topical or theme-driven events, we adopted a lectionary reading model in which we read through a book of the Bible together each term and follow a fixed sequence in each four-year cycle. But it’s how we read these books that defines our narrative approach: instead of mining the texts for life principles or religious codes, we try to discern how this piece of the puzzle fits into the larger story of God’s plan. We read the text as it applies to the metanarrative of God and creation, and we seek to follow the dots on the trajectory out beyond their literary-historical particularities. In this way scripture becomes our grammar, with its application to our lives requiring a sustained conversation with the Spirit.

In practice the narrative that undergirds worship and teaching looks something like this:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, everything that is, and called it good. The kind of life that God intends for this world is one marked by wholeness and vulnerable love. We all know, however, that things are not well. The world is broken and fragmented, both of our own doing and for reasons outside our control. We long for more and so does God.

Beginning with the calling of Abraham and Sarah, God chooses to form a particular people to be God’s agents in the world—always for the ultimate purpose of the whole world’s blessing. To explore this point is to tell the history of the people Israel, including the formation of the covenant relationship and the constant guidance and correction given by the prophets, urging the people to missional faithfulness.

Throughout God's history with this people, visions of the future have been communicated in many different ways. The Old and New Testament prophets are witnesses to a coming kingdom that includes the reconciliation of all things. Learning to dream these dreams with our prophets is essential to finding our place in the story.

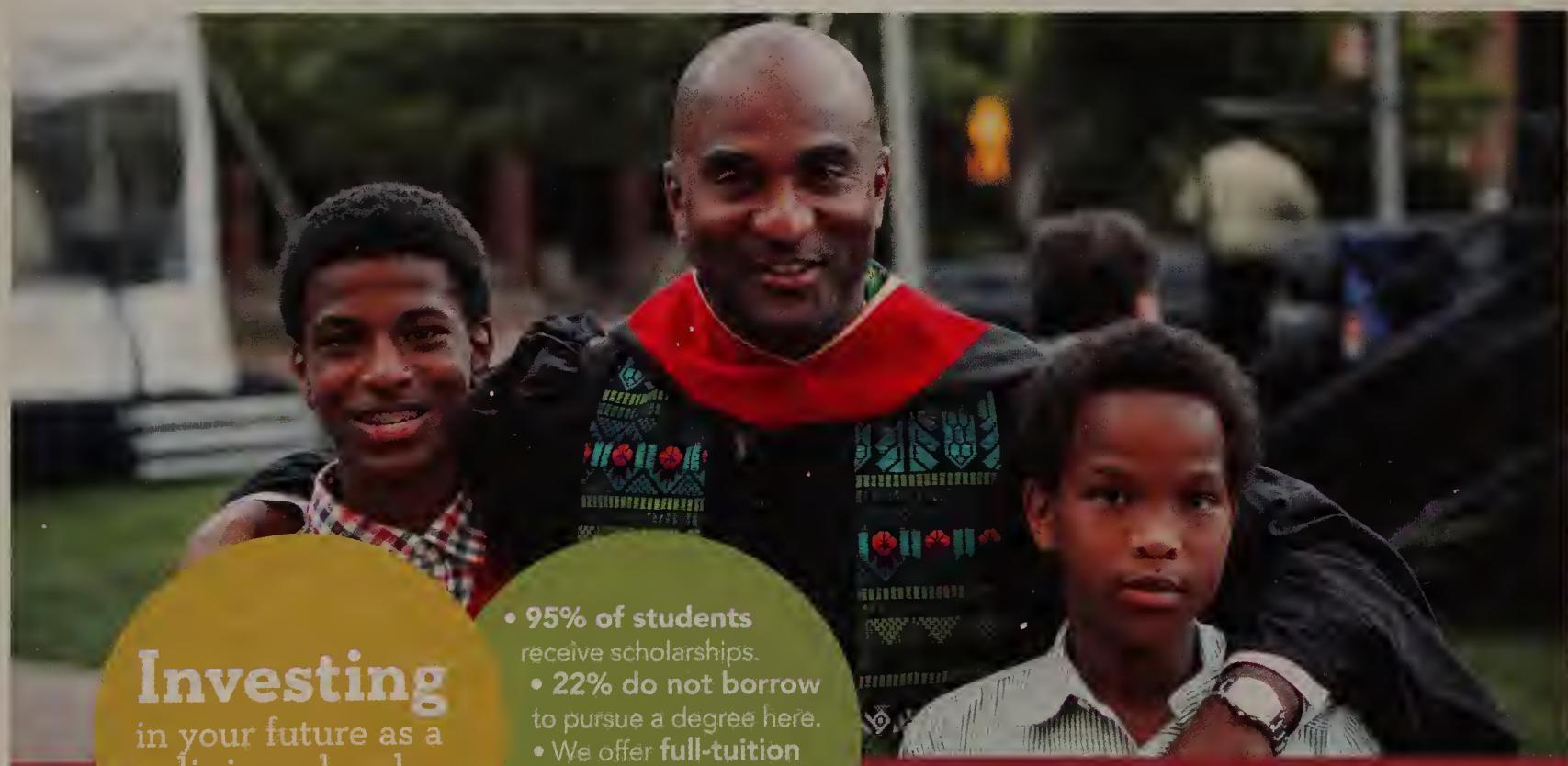
The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus serve as the lens through which the whole story comes into focus for Christians. In the events surrounding Christ we are given the clearest vision yet for what God intends to accomplish and by what means. Here we see God's kenosis and self-chosen unification with the world. Against that backdrop we understand the death and resurrection of Jesus: Jesus was subjected to the decay of this creation to the point of utter annihilation but then raised to new life. This confirms the promises spoken through the prophets since the beginning. Because we believe that this happened to Jesus, we may also believe that we will be restored as well. For us the dreams of the prophets are not just wishful thinking—we declare their reality, although this reality is future to us. We believe that God's creation will be raised like Jesus—that the world around us, including us, will be transformed into God's new creation.

The story includes our future. For us it is a fact that the future of this universe is the full reign of God. The future looks like the reconciliation of humans and humans,

humans and the natural world, all things and God. In the fullness of time, all of creation will be filled and fulfilled by the presence of God. The Spirit of God lives and acts in the world today as a sign and a promise of this coming reality, and our mission is to claim for ourselves and our world the wholeness that we see on the horizon, for it is our truest identity.

Although students may initially think that they need an immediate yes-or-no answer to all of life's moral questions, they find that when they're inducted into a broader narrative of salvation history they're less frantic about quick clarity and more comfortable with a process of discernment. Samuel Wells describes this effort as "the ethics of improvisation." This approach also allows students to retain the distinctiveness of their own cultures and traditions. The unity of vision and Christian mission grants them the diversity of their particularities.

Our communal journey of formation at SPU is never complete; we'll always be learning how to live together with greater unity and clarity of vision. But in a world of bitter divisions we're convinced that reconciliation is possible in the community of God. It begins with the embrace of a hope-filled Christian story and its vision of our common future. By God's grace we'll work out some of the details and disagreements along the way. In the meantime, we're walking toward that kingdom together.



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# Bonhoeffer as youth minister

# Young life together

by Andrew Root

I WOULD BET that nearly all pastors who work with youth have caught themselves—just a little bit—contemplating murder. The frustration, confusion, and pure annoyance of teaching the tradition to energy drink-fueled young people can be acute. Possibly to avoid arrest and the shame and notoriety that come with a public trial, pastors often opt out of youth ministry, giving that work to someone else. Youth ministry seems to be for those wired to be enthusiastic entertainers or unyielding prison guards, or something other than the theologically thoughtful person that pastors usually imagine themselves to be.

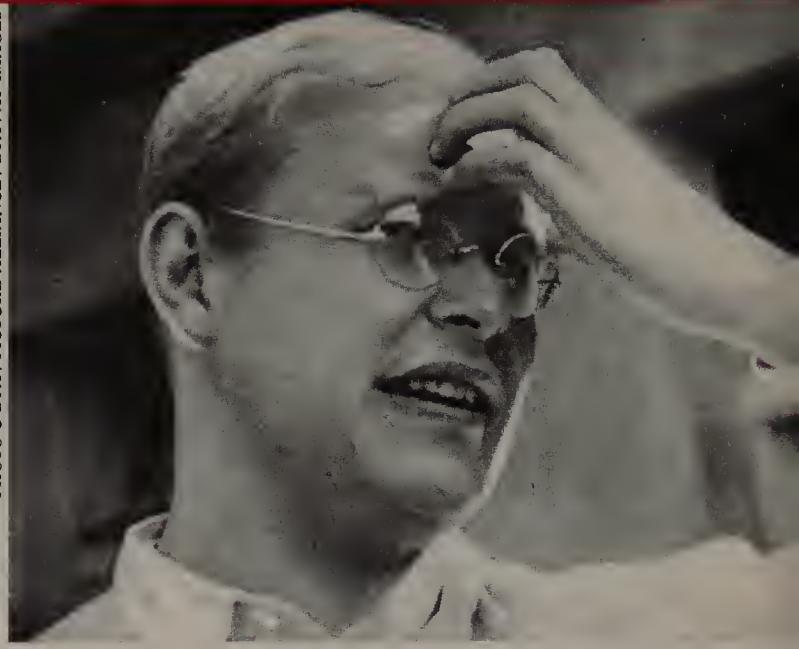
I would also bet, however, that these same theologically thoughtful pastors have at least one book by Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the shelf and remember from seminary days at least parts of Bonhoeffer's biography. They remember Bonhoeffer's encounter with the black church in Harlem, his work in the Confessing Church in Germany, his writing of *The Cost of Discipleship*, his heading up the illegal seminary in Finkenwalde, his *Ethics*, and of course his arrest, his letters and papers from prison, and finally his martyrdom. Bonhoeffer is just the kind of engaged, intellectual, and action-oriented Christian that pastors admire.

These two seemingly disconnected parts of pastoral life come together in the fact that Bonhoeffer himself was a youth worker. Nearly all the direct ministry that Bonhoeffer did was with children or youth. From 1925 to 1939, when World War II broke out, it is nearly impossible to find a period that Bonhoeffer was not working with children or teens. This history is often missed when telling the story of Bonhoeffer. He saw it as his core theological and pastoral task to wade into the chaos of the lives and experience of young people as a witness to the gospel.

Bonhoeffer knew directly how crazy-making confirmation could be, how murderous thoughts and Luther's Small Catechism could oddly become wrapped together. In 1932 he was asked by his synod to take over an out-of-control confirmation class in a low-income district of Berlin called Wedding. Bonhoeffer had already shown skill at youth ministry. He had excelled in this area in Grunewald and Barcelona, had taught Sunday school in Harlem, and had just months earlier been elected secretary of an ecumenical youth movement.

Pastor Maller, who had been leading the confirmation class, had had many murderous thoughts. He could take it no more.

PHOTO © DPA / PICTURE-ALLIANCE / DPA / AP IMAGES



Just weeks after turning the class over to Bonhoeffer, Maller died of a heart attack. Bonhoeffer told his friend Erwin Sutz in a letter that this confirmation class "had quite literally annoyed him to death."

It didn't take long for Bonhoeffer to witness the level of bedlam Maller faced. When Maller led Bonhoeffer to the class, the boys waited on the top floor as Bonhoeffer and Maller climbed the stairs. As they approached, the boys serenaded them with screams, stomping, and a confetti welcome of paper and banana peels. Upon reaching the top, Maller screamed and shoved the boys into the classroom (not good for his ailing heart) and shouted that Pastor Dr. Bonhoeffer was now their teacher. The boys began chanting "Bon, Bon, Bon," and Maller turned and walked out the door.

Bonhoeffer allowed the chanting to continue for a few minutes. Then he began to speak very quietly, telling a story from his experience in Harlem. One by one, the boys quieted down and leaned forward to hear what he was saying. The room fell quiet as Bonhoeffer continued with stories from New York. And with his stories a new spirit was injected into the group. Bonhoeffer dismissed them that day with the promise of more stories to come.

In this first encounter, we can recognize the pedagogical shape of Bonhoeffer's ministry. He used his own stories to create a space for these boys to enter. He shared his life as he promised to share in theirs. As Bonhoeffer saw it, if these boys were to learn the catechism, they would have to learn it through sharing in another person's life. And for this to be possible Dietrich would need to remain composed.

This first encounter displays the two core commitments that shaped Bonhoeffer's confirmation pedagogy: remain calm and composed and share personal experience. Richard Rother, one of the boys in the confirmation class, said later that Bonhoeffer "was so composed that it was easy for him to guide us; he made us familiar with the catechism in quite a new way, making it alive for us by telling us of many personal experiences."

Andrew Root teaches at Luther Seminary. This essay is adapted from his recent book *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together*.

Composure and stories became fertile ground for encountering Jesus Christ. A year or so after his experience at Wedding, Bonhoeffer wrote in his christological lectures (published in English as *Christ the Center*) that Jesus is found with and for our neighbor and that when we share in our neighbor we share in Christ himself. It seems likely that in some way the boys in Wedding were on his mind.

The relational connections were possible only if he remained composed. It actually may be that composure is essential to leadership—composure not only as a personality trait but as the spiritual practice of prayerfully avoiding anxiety.

Anxiety, as neuropsychologists tell us today, is toxic; our brains are wired to avoid anxiety. Anxiety corrupts the chemistry of the brain and leads us to depart (emotionally or physically) from others to protect ourselves. Jesus' words to his disciples to "fear not" (Luke 8:50) become of utmost significance. Anxiety is so acidic that it is nearly impossible to have relationships where the air is poisoned with it.

Our murderous rage toward young people often arises because we wrap ourselves in anxiety, feeling the temptation to

## Bonhoeffer shared stories of his life so as to create a space for others.

define our ministry as something that exists outside our relationships with these young people. We start thinking things like, "Why aren't they getting this? Why are they so disconnected? What am I doing wrong? Why am I not interesting or cool enough to connect to them? Why won't they just listen or engage?"

This anxiety leads us tacitly to believe that our job is bound more to the content and material of the curriculum than to the humanity of the young people. Filled with anxiety, we cling to what we can control—getting from page 14 to 16 in the curriculum—but then our anxiety turns into anger as the young people disengage, sensing that we care more for the content than for them.

Bonhoeffer's approach signaled to the boys that he had no worry about lessons being unfinished or of others thinking he was a failure. He signaled that he really was there just for them, rather than to fulfill some goal that they could frustrate (like getting them through the material). As a result, the youth were willing to be led.

And lead them Bonhoeffer did. He did not shy away from teaching them the catechism and taking them deeply into the tradition of the Christian faith. But

this faith had to be concrete and lived; its confession needed to be born from personal narratives.

**B**onhoeffer admitted in a letter to his friend Erwin Sutz that he didn't prepare much for these classes. Knowing the material well, he sought through spontaneous sermonettes to weave together their stories and the tradition that already lived deeply within him.

"Something I almost hate to admit but which is true: I never prepared for the classes in detail. Of course, I knew the material very well, but then I just went there, talked with the boys for a couple of minutes before the class, and then just started. I didn't hesitate, quite often, just to preach to the children; I believe everything else is, in the final analysis, pedagogically doctrinaire."

To be "pedagogically doctrinaire" is to make the material more important than the lives. With the Bible and Luther's Small Catechism in hand, Bonhoeffer invited the boys to witness and share with him as he followed Jesus Christ. The central material of Christian faith is not the content of creeds and catechisms but Jesus Christ, who lives in the humanity of lived experience.

In another letter to Sutz, Bonhoeffer wrote: "At the beginning the boys were acting wild, so for the first time I really had discipline problems." He continued, "But here too one thing helped, namely, just simply telling the boys Bible stories in massive quantity, and especially eschatological passages. By the way, in doing this I also made use of the Spirituals. Now it is absolutely quiet, and the boys see to that themselves, so that I no longer have to fear the same fate as my predecessor."

Bonhoeffer reminds us that we must form our ministries around explorations of the living Christ. He also points us to the practical dispositions of doing youth ministry. He encourages us to do ministry through stories of our own faith life and to prayerfully seek composure, a spirit of calm. A calm disposition, coupled with narration, creates fertile ground for a depth of relationship (what Bonhoeffer called *Stellvertretung* or "place-sharing") that mediates the presence of the living Christ. Rather than being onerous, ministry with youth can be an invitation into the very community where Jesus Christ is present, bringing life out of death. cc

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# Why I went to seminary

by Chris Coons

**LONG BEFORE** I ever sat in Senate hearing rooms listening to the testimony of witnesses, I sat in lecture halls at Yale Divinity School listening to professors dissect the Pauline letters. My path from law student to divinity student to U.S. senator may not have been the most conventional, but divinity school changed me, and it changed how I see what I do in the U.S. Senate.

I have felt a calling to ministry my entire life. As a youth I was active in my church and youth group and as a volunteer. My parents also put their faith into action. I grew up watching my dad teach Sunday school and volunteer with a prison ministry group—even hosting a convicted felon on furlough weekends at our home, much to our neighbors' dismay. My mom committed her time to work at a church program serving homeless and battered women.

Following college, I spent a year in Washington writing and researching issues related to apartheid and South Africa. Tired of the abstract nature of think-tank work, I felt an urge to put my faith into action. I traveled to Kenya and South Africa with Plowshares Institute, a faith-based global engagement group, and stayed on for four months afterward. I volunteered with the South African Council of Churches and got to work with many inspiring leaders, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu. I also served with a powerfully faithful woman in Kenya, Zipporah Kamau, who was launching an orphanage outside Nairobi.

When I returned to the United States, I joined the Coalition for the Homeless in New York, which was led by a crusading lawyer, Bob Hayes, and traveled across the country working in homeless shelters and with homeless advocates.

In all these experiences, I was exposed to impressive leaders and advocates who used their skills and training, whether as pastors or attorneys, to make a difference in the world and to serve with those who were oppressed or marginalized. I could tell there were limits to how much of a difference I could make without some formal training. The advocates I most admired were well educated and deeply grounded in their professions.

I had always wrestled with competing interests in law and religion. In 1988, law won out, and I enrolled at Yale Law School. While volunteering in the law clinic during fall semester of my first year, I became friendly with another law student who was also taking classes at the divinity school. He told me about one particular class with Sister Margaret Farley that he said would change my life: "This class is amazing. You have to come once and give it a try."

The next semester I audited her class on Augustine, Aquinas,

Luther, and Calvin. Sister Farley was absolutely riveting. I had no formal training in the theological roots of the Reformation or the Christian faith, but ancient texts became deeply engaging for me because of her talented teaching.

After Sister Farley's class, I was hooked. I took another class the next semester, and another the following semester. Finally, the dean of admissions at the divinity school, who was a member of my congregation in New Haven, came up to me at church one Sunday and said, "You know, we do let lawyers go to the div school." I looked at him and said, "What are you

## My going to divinity school surprised my law school friends.

talking about?" He told me I could actually be admitted and take a degree at the divinity school; I'd just have to fill out some paperwork. After years of struggling between what felt like entirely different paths, I realized I didn't have to choose.

**M**y decision to pursue a divinity degree surprised and even alienated a lot of my friends in the law school. My group of friends was very progressive, very accepting of everyone—everyone except, I learned, people of faith. A number of them stopped talking to me, and some acted like I had lost my mind. They were dismissive of divinity as a serious field of study. It was one of the first times I experienced some genuine intolerance as a person of faith, particularly from friends in the progressive community. It was a difficult and eye-opening experience.

Despite some resistance, I never doubted my choice. The next two years of my life were incredibly formative. After starting divinity school, I helped form a prayer group with a number of other law students who were also committed Christians, and it became a dominant feature in my social life. Although I had better formal instruction in the discipline, details, and doctrine of faith at the divinity school, I actually experienced my

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*Chris Coons, a graduate of Yale Divinity School and Yale Law School, is former county executive of New Castle County in Delaware and the junior U.S. senator from Delaware.*



**CONNECTING:** “Divinity school helped me connect my interest in service to the traditions and obligations of my faith.”

spiritual formation through interactions with my law school peers. They came from a broad range of cultural and political backgrounds—some were very conservative and some were progressive—but they were all struggling with the culture of law school and the same kinds of questions about our purpose. Why be a lawyer? Why be involved in service? Our discussions challenged my thinking and strengthened my faith.

If there's one thing, more than any other, that came out of my formal training in scriptural analysis, it was a focus on humility—an insistence on humility—in asserting you know the will of God and understand the word of God.

One of the best things about Yale Divinity School is that there were people in my classes from a wide range of faith traditions. Eight of us might look at the same passage and interpret it eight different ways. Divinity school gave us the chance to debate our competing viewpoints and challenge each other's assertions. Hearing about how differently various Christian traditions had read and applied the same texts over time taught me an important lesson in humility.

Some of my most meaningful learning in divinity school happened through service outside of the classroom. New Haven, like many American cities, is a study in contrasts. Outside the sprawling courtyards and gothic facades of the Yale campus is a community that has long been plagued by violence and poverty. I could have confined my experiences to the insulated campus community at Yale, but my upbringing and values demanded otherwise. Even before attending the divinity school, I was actively involved in the housing and homelessness clinic at the law school, helping a group of students successfully sue the governor of Connecticut on behalf of 1,200 homeless families.

Divinity school gave me the opportunity to connect my interest in service to the traditions and obligations of my faith.

One of my most memorable experiences was organizing an enactment of the Stations of the Cross in the New Haven community just after the start of the first Gulf War. I was serving at the time as a pastoral intern with the Downtown Cooperative Ministry, an interfaith alliance of a dozen churches, synagogues, and social service ministries. The war had begun abroad, and at home, New Haven ranked among the poorest cities in the nation. With so much suffering around us, this was a chance to take an ancient Catholic devotional tradition and make it real and meaningful to the community.

We gathered a group of 50 people and performed the stations at churches and at shelters and soup kitchens across the city that served the homeless. It was a powerful, public demonstration—a large-scale witness for justice and peace that was rooted in the suffering of Christ.

I think there's a broad misconception out there—and I came to divinity school believing it—that only those with unshakably firm conviction and profound faith belong in ministry. My divinity school training taught me that, in fact, the opposite is true. In order to be an effective preacher and faith leader, you've got to question. I came out of school more convinced than ever that doubt is essential to faith—that without doubt it's not faith; it's a dogmatic belief that can become extremism. The whole essence—the definition—of faith rests on a foundation of doubt, and if it rests on a foundation of doubt and questioning, then that demands of us humility as we interpret the text and serve in the world.

Divinity school taught me that, at its core, a life of faith is a life grounded in service and humility. I've taken those values with me as my career has progressed from county government to the U.S. Senate. I hope they are evident in every decision I make as a member of Congress.



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## Marked as human

**REMEMBER YOU ARE** dust, and to dust you shall return." These ancient words have been passed down from Christian to Christian over countless Ash Wednesdays. They have their source in God's admonition to Adam and Eve on their way out of paradise. When we repeat them we remember that we continue that journey into the vast, fallen world. With our foreheads smeared with ashes, we remember our failings and our mortality.

It is a day of individual reflection. We receive the ashes together but also one at a time, each body individually marked. "I know my transgressions," we sing with the psalmist, "and my sin is ever before me." We sit in silence together and recall what we have done and left undone. We remember we are dust and that we will return to dust. And we ponder the mystery of the incarnation that gathers up and blesses the brevity and fragility of our life.

Ash Wednesday is also a day to consider our shared future as members one of another. It is not only our individual lives that are fragile. As the changes in our climate accelerate and the divisions in our societies deepen, Ash Wednesday is a day to remember the fragility of the life of the earth itself and the human communities it sustains.

My mother, sister, and I love to share our favorite novels with each other and then talk about them when we get together. Over the last several years we've noticed that many of the books that mean the most to us are concerned with the vulnerability of the world's future.

In the *Maddaddam* trilogy, Margaret Atwood imagines what might be the place of humans and their religions after a human-made plague winnows the earth's population. In *The Bone Clocks*, David Mitchell conjures the struggle of human communities to survive the effects of climate change as they become isolated from each other, the Internet begins to flicker out, and roving gangs use drones to identify plunder. The power of these novels lies in their ability to imagine a future that seems plausible, if not inevitable, and which is already a reality for many people on this planet. These stories give us a way to think about our most unthinkable fears.

In my most recent favorite, *Station Eleven*, Emily St. John Mandel imagines the landscape of the upper Midwest after a virulent strain of swine flu wipes out most of the earth's population. If you are looking for a book to meditate on this Lent, I recommend this one. *Station Eleven* tells interlocking stories about characters seeking ways to support shared human life when the world they know has come to a sudden end. One group of sur-

vivors forms a company of actors and musicians who travel from settlement to settlement to perform music and the plays of Shakespeare. As they travel the dangerous roads between the makeshift towns that have grown up around Lake Michigan, they encounter violence and cruelty but also decency and compassion. Wherever they stop, they perform a play that reminds themselves and their audiences of the countless human possibilities that make life worth living.

*Station Eleven* reveals the irreplaceable beauty of much that we take for granted. Mandel's characters are constantly arrested by small things: the satisfactions of friendship and work, the ecstasy of feeling fully awake and alive, the way a simple decent act can transform those who witness it. Climate activist and divinity student Tim DeChristopher says that our most urgent work now is to find ways of holding onto our humanity as we move through the changes that will be and already have been caused by climate change. Mandel's novel is a meditation on the gestures and choices that help us remain

## The smeared cross helps us confront our greatest fears.

human when so much of what once supported human life has fallen away.

The smeared crosses on our foreheads are an incarnational work of art that helps us confront our greatest fears. When we are marked with ashes we are marked not only with a sign of our mortality but also with a sign of the struggle to remain human under the greatest possible pressure. We follow Jesus into the desert of Lent to learn about the most mysterious possibilities that our humanity holds: healing, resistance, love, and forgiveness. Again and again, year after year, he teaches us that human life holds more possibilities than we've ever imagined.

Ash Wednesday is an opportunity both to acknowledge our individual mortality and to recognize the fragility of our planet and the communities that make it their home. As we remember our sins and ask to be forgiven, let's also remember what we love and ask to love it more. May the ashy crosses on our foreheads be a sign of commitment to each other and to the life of this fragile world.

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Stephanie Paulsell teaches at Harvard Divinity School.

## Incurable condition

by LaVonne Neff

**A** blade of grass—a biblical symbol of life’s fragility—reaches across the book jacket just above the title, which itself reminds us that we are bound to die. The introduction plunges us into a world of suffering and terminal illness. Chapter titles like “Things Fall Apart” and “Letting Go” refuse to sugar-coat the topic. “There’s no escaping the tragedy of life, which is that we are all aging from the day we are born,” Atul Gawande intones. *Being Mortal* is not a cheery book. It will not appeal to those who want to believe that every problem has a solution.

And yet when the book was released last October, it became an instant best seller. By the end of the year it was on many people’s list of the best books of 2014, and Gawande—cancer surgeon, Harvard Medical School professor, and *New Yorker* staff writer—had appeared on *The Daily Show*, PBS’s *Frontline*, and *Charlie Rose*. I have told my daughters that before I make them agents on my health care power of attorney, they must read this book.

*Being Mortal* is about death. It is about our misguided approach to end-of-life care that causes unnecessary misery. It is about changes we must make in the way we treat and the way we think. Above all, it is about the need for relentless honesty, especially when we are afraid.

Gawande is an engrossing writer no matter how unsettling his topic. His previous best-selling books attest to that: *Complications* and *Better* are essay collections about the uncertainties of health care, and *The Checklist Manifesto* argues in favor of routine procedures over individual brilliance.

Like those books, *Being Mortal* abounds in human-interest stories—of

the retired geriatrician who cares for his ailing wife in an assisted living center (until she falls and needs more care than he can give); the elderly widower whose daughter promises never to put him in a nursing home (until job and family demands force her to reconsider); the young mother with intractable cancer whose family refuses to let her go (thus giving her additional weeks of pain); the author’s own father, who must decide whether to have the gigantic tumor inside his spinal cord removed (and risk paraplegia); the former beauty queen with metastatic ovarian cancer who just wants to live long enough to attend a wedding.

All stories eventually end in death, of course. But when we accept our mortality, Gawande believes, we increase our chances for a peaceful ending. Tragically, most of us prefer reassuring fantasies.

“We’re always trotting out some story of a ninety-seven-year-old who runs marathons,” Gawande writes, “as if such cases were not miracles of biological luck but reasonable expectations for all.” We say we would never want to be kept alive and miserable through pharmaceutical or medical technology, but then we beg the medical profession to fix whatever ails us. We shut our eyes to the reality that some of us (Gawande says most) “will spend significant periods of our lives too reduced and debilitated to live independently.” Yet the more we avoid such difficult truths, the more likely we are to cause suffering to those whose time is short. Not every ailment can be fixed. Not every ailment *should* be fixed.

We need to talk, Gawande says. Medical school professors need to talk to students about how best to treat the seriously ill. Doctors need to talk to patients

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
THE CHECKLIST MANIFESTO

Atul Gawande

Being Mortal

Medicine and What Matters in the End

### Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End

By Atul Gawande  
Metropolitan, 304 pp., \$26.00

about the probable results of any proposed intervention: Is it likely to add three weeks of life? Ten years? And what will the added time be like for this individual? Patients need to talk to health care providers and to their own family members about their hopes and fears and values. We all need to talk to one another about devising more appropriate care for those with shortened life expectancies who need help but who do not need a hospital or typical nursing home.

All of this has been said before, but Gawande says it especially well. Besides decrying the sorry state of our approach to end-of-life care, he applauds people who are doing things right. Pioneers like Keren Brown Wilson, an early developer of assisted living facilities, who wanted to find a place where her mother could feel at home after a debilitating stroke at age 55. Visionaries like physician-turned-farmer Bill Thomas, founder of Eden Alternative nursing homes, where seniors are surrounded with gardens and animal companions. Practical change agents like retired biologists Margaret and Norman Cohn, who organized a neighborhood support system that allows them to live independently in spite of Norman’s severe arthritis and Margaret’s inability to walk. We are not helpless, Gawande writes. “We have the opportunity to refashion our institutions, our culture, and our conversations in ways that trans-

LaVonne Neff is an editor and writer who blogs at *Lively Dust*.

form the possibilities for the last chapters of everyone's lives."

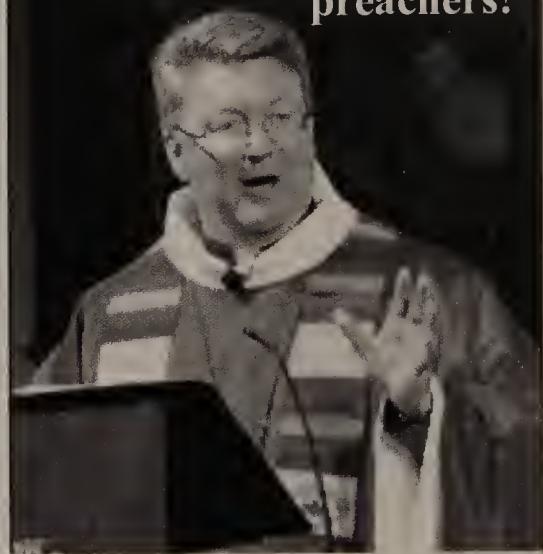
Palliative care is one important way to transform those last chapters. People tend to think of palliative care, often administered through hospices, as nothing more than a sign of resignation: because the patients are going to die anyway, medical treatment is suspended so they can get on with it. This is a gross misconception, Gawande maintains. Palliative care specialists actively help patients relieve anxiety, realize their hopes, and enjoy their remaining days. The results can surprise. One study showed that people enrolled in hospice "suffered less, were physically more capable, and were better able, for a longer period, to interact with others" than those who followed the traditional medical route. In another study, hospice patients experienced less suffering and lived 25 percent longer than others.

American late-life care has begun to change. It is easier today than it was 20 years ago to find elder care that preserves independence while offering necessary

assistance. The percentage of people who die at home rather than in the hospital is increasing. Hospices serve nearly half of us at the time of death. Nevertheless, we still have a long way to go. The percentage of doctors specializing in geriatrics has dropped by one-quarter since 1996. Only 3 percent of medical students take any course in geriatrics, and many geriatric services are not covered by Medicare.

It is past time for a new health care paradigm, one that favors human flourishing over technical fixes. In his passionate epilogue, Gawande addresses fellow medical professionals. "We've been wrong about what our job is in medicine," he writes. "We think our job is to ensure health and survival. But really it is larger than that. It is to enable well-being.... Our interventions, and the risks and sacrifices they entail, are justified only if they serve the larger aims of a person's life. When we forget that, the suffering we inflict can be barbaric. When we remember it, the good we do can be breathtaking."

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## Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists

By Curtis W. Freeman  
Baylor University Press, 478 pp., \$49.95

Curtis Freeman has written an important and compelling study of the past and the future of Baptists. The director of the Baptist House of Studies at Duke Divinity School, Freeman combines detailed reflection on the history of Baptists with vigorous theological advocacy for catholicity.

The terms of his engagement are indicated in the title of his book: the phrase "other Baptists" refers to those Baptists who can no longer find an ecclesial home in the Southern Baptist Convention. The book is a reflective proposal for how other Baptists, who are everywhere visible in a variety of formal and informal associations, can take Baptist theology and tradition seriously without being hemmed in by sectarian-

ism. Freeman contends that other Baptists can readily understand the catholic tradition of faith and situate themselves within it, but the Baptist heritage invites them to a posture of contestation in which they continue to question and dissent from some claims and practices of that catholic tradition.

Thus Freeman's book addresses primarily Baptists, but his concern matters to all Christians (including Roman Catholics) who live in denominational separatism but who are summoned to embrace the richness of catholic faith and tradition in a generous orthodoxy. The problem of alienation from the catholic tradition is not peculiar to Baptists. It is a common malady on the American ecclesial scene.

The book is organized into two unequal parts: "Sickness unto Death" traces the development of Baptist sectarianism into a kind of undisciplined liberalism in the United States; "Life That Really Is Life" contains a proposal for a Baptist embrace of catholic faith and tra-

dition. Put simply, the two parts are a meditation on ecclesial death and a proposal for ecclesial life.

The pivot in the first, shorter part of the book is "alterity," with a "pathological fear of the other" and what might become generous engagement with the other. At the outset Freeman contrasts John Winthrop's refusal to "acknowledge the other of American Indians" with Roger Williams's approach: the "Ur-Baptist of America" recognized the otherness of indigenous people and practiced hospitality toward them.

Freeman then traces the disputatious history of conservative Christians who relied on rationalism and liberal Christians who appealed to experience, which eventuated in the stalemate of fundamentalism versus liberalism. Given that history, Freeman contends that "other Baptists" must seek another way in generative orthodoxy that makes room for the other but does not compromise the primary claims of faith that bespeak a rich catholicity. He treats the move



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toward such generous orthodoxy with historical particularity, discussing the prophetic insistences of Carlyle Marney and the judicious formulations of James McClendon. In reference to the ecumenical creeds, Freeman writes: "Other Baptists move beyond fundamentalism and liberalism toward the bedrock of catholicity."

The second, meaty part of the book is an exposition of catholicity with an eye toward how it matters to Baptists, how Baptists respond to it, and the contributions Baptists may make to its future. Freeman begins by appealing to the creeds and thus the trinitarian formulation that cannot be compromised. He observes:

Liberals seem inclined to find unitarianism of the First Person as more reasonable, while evangelicals appear prone to regard unitarianism of the Second Person as more relevant. One might conclude, then, that Baptists are unitarians that simply have not yet gotten around to denying the Trinity.

Freeman insists on a re-embrace of trinitarianism not as an esoteric formulation but as a living practice and a generative conviction. He reflects on the nature of the church and riffs on "soul competence," which has led, in Baptist circles, to privatized piety. His insistence on a recovery of catholic ecclesiology requires a recognition of the communal character of the gathered community, which cannot be private, individualistic, or endlessly local but is a part of a universal community over time and space.

The final three chapters address, in turn, scripture, the Eucharist, and baptism. In his chapter on scripture, Freeman does not break new ground. He powerfully resists private, individualistic scripture interpretation and insists on responsible reading by the entire community. He affirms, not surprisingly, that "more light" is yet to come from scripture, and that view works against settled

conclusions. In this probe Marney is his great model of openness.

In the chapter on the Eucharist, Freeman takes into account the Baptist reluctance to regard the Eucharist as sacrament—reluctance that reflects in part resistance to "magic" and in part a "Romophobic tendency." He inveighs against a Baptist readiness to regard communion as "mere symbol" and insists that it is not only a symbol but an instrument

that both tells the truth and conveys grace. In a reflection on the 16th-century dispute over "presence," Freeman judges that even Zwingli in his final years "emerged as a reformed catholic theologian," so that "there is a doctrine of real presence in Zwingli's sacramental theology." This exposition ends with an appeal to the most compelling liturgical formulae about communion, with a recognition that it is not formulation but practice that will

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As we might expect, the chapter on baptism brings into play the cluster of acute questions concerning infant baptism, believer's baptism, and immersion. Freeman notes that it is now widely recognized that believer's baptism is normative from the earliest tradition and that other forms of baptism are an accommodation. He regards this as an important

Baptist contribution to catholicity. At the same time, he allows that "other Baptists" will make room for infant baptism while resisting any requirement of rebaptism. He appeals to Warren Carr, who judged that "infant baptism plus confirmation equals believer's baptism." Freeman concludes: "Other Baptists are prepared to see infant baptism as a form of baptism derived from the norm of believer's baptism, while only practicing the normative



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form in their own communities." And this leads to a further judgment: "Other Baptists see themselves as a radically reforming community of contestation within the church catholic." Such a stance precludes sectarianism and bespeaks ready engagement with the other.

Freeman's exposition of catholicity is an important one that invites reflection across the ecumenical church. New thinking is required in a season of great bewilderment, when old practices and formulations are seen to be adequate.

Two reservations occur to me. First, Freeman very highly esteems verbal assent to confessional creedal formulations. He seems to assume that such assent is a guarantee of faithfulness. But twice he alludes to Miroslav Volf's judgment that in his homeland of Croatia, Catholic identity was "inclined more to superstition than faith" and was embraced "more for nationalistic reasons." Freeman surely knows that assent to creedal confessional formulae assures nothing, but he does not do much with that limitation. Much Baptist practice

has been faithful even when such assent was absent. Saying "Lord, Lord" is not a sign of practical obedience.

My second wonderment is at the absence of any interest in a missional definition of the church. Although Freeman alludes to the World Council of Churches document "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" and allows that baptism is a "missional practice," his presentation leaves catholicity as a reified claim that lives in a vacuum of suspension. I would have thought, in light of Vatican II, that missional engagement with socioeconomic issues belongs to the character of the church. Of course, Freeman might say that they were not his brief.

I hope that along with discussing the "truly catholic," Freeman will turn his energy to the truly evangelical and truly reformed. There is much to ponder in this important book; but there is also more to do in articulating the claims of catholicity. In the meantime, the other Baptists I know are well along in being truly catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed.

## God's Planet

By Owen Gingerich

Harvard University Press, 192 pp., \$19.95

How is one to understand the relationship between science and religion? "New atheists," such as Richard Dawkins, have a ready answer: they are in conflict. Either one accepts the Bible's account of a six-day creation and Adam and Eve, or one adopts a scientific worldview incorporating the Big Bang theory and evolution. There is no middle ground; the two are incompatible, and one has to make a choice.

This is a simplistic viewpoint. It doesn't take into account the many scientists who have no difficulty accepting the findings of science and yet subscribe to a theistic belief system. The evolution-

Reviewed by Russell Stannard, *emeritus professor of physics at Open University in the United Kingdom.*

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ary biologist Stephen Jay Gould proposed an alternative. He regarded science and religion as addressing different kinds of questions. Science is concerned with uncovering how the world operates, while religion is concerned with broader questions having to do with purpose and overall meaning. Each has its own domain of competence. There need be no

conflict, providing that religion and science stick to their own territory. This viewpoint is known as nonoverlapping magisteria.

In his short, punchy, accessible, and thought-provoking book *God's Planet*, Owen Gingerich goes a step farther with a more nuanced approach. As emeritus professor of astronomy and the history

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of science at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, he is well qualified to address the issue. He agrees with Gould that the two disciplines address different kinds of questions and that we need both discourses to gain a fuller understanding of what is going on. But are science and religion really as independent of each other as Gould would have us believe? Gingerich says no. Not only can scientific discoveries affect religious beliefs, one's religious mind-set can mold how one receives and interprets scientific developments.

What sets this book apart from others dealing with the science-religion debate is that rather than dealing in generalities, the author illustrates his viewpoint by focusing on three case studies related to the work of three scientists, Nicolaus Copernicus, Charles Darwin, and Fred Hoyle. The introduction of personal details concerning these thinkers makes what is already an easy read even more enjoyable and engaging.

Today it strikes us as obvious that the earth goes around the sun rather than the reverse. So why did it take a century and a half for Copernicus's ideas, set out in *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, to gain universal acceptance? Was Arthur Koestler right in claiming that virtually nobody read that daunting

400-page tome? Gingerich has uncovered persuasive evidence that this was not the case. Copernicus's book was well read by fellow scholars.

So why the delay in embracing Copernicus's views? Partly it was because some of the evidence in favor of a heliocentric universe was not yet on

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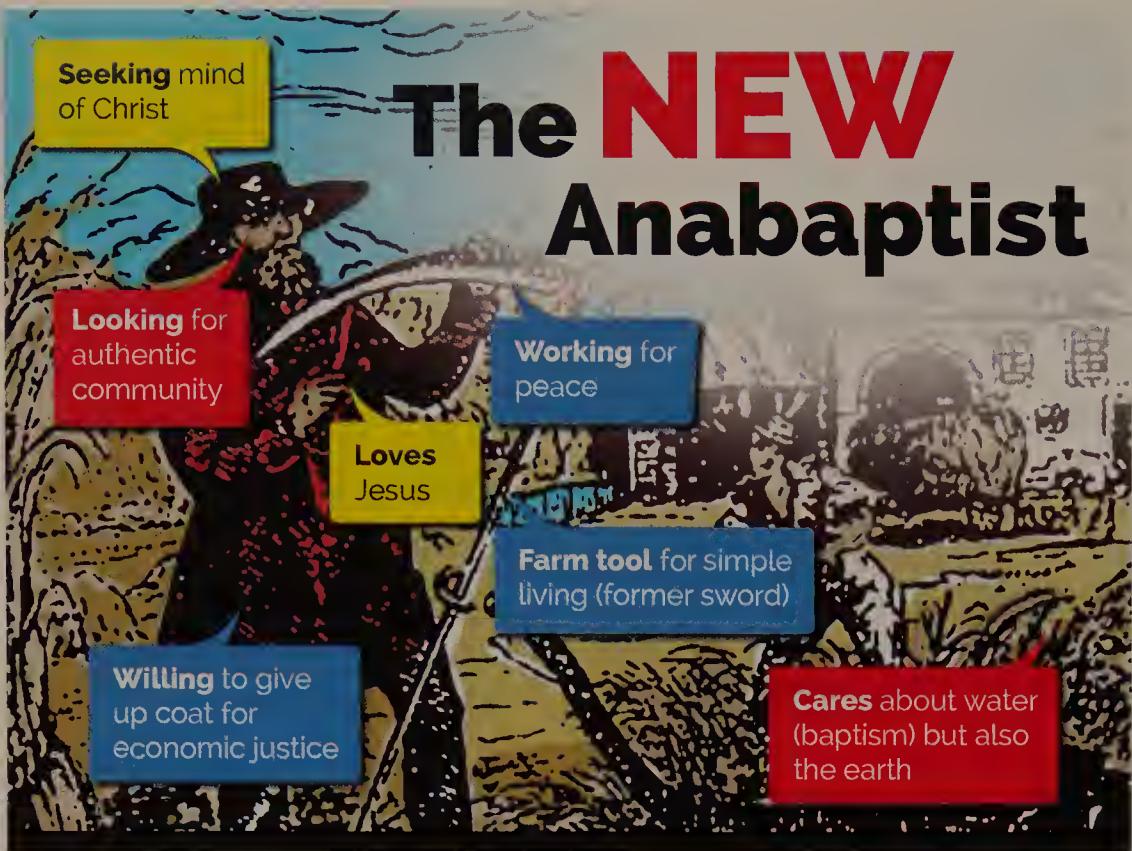
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hand. But more important was the religious mind-set of the time, which was rooted in a literal interpretation of the Bible. One thinks, for example, of the declaration in Psalm 104 that "the Lord God fixed the Earth on its foundation so that it can never be moved."

Furthermore, there was in place at that time a very neat understanding of the cosmos: the earth was at the center, the sun and planets revolved around it in their respective orbits, then the stars, and beyond them the heavenly realm, and finally on the outside, God's arms holding all in place. It was an aesthetically pleasing picture that many were reluctant to relinquish. Thus we have an example of how religious thinking can affect scientific progress.

We see the same forces at work in Gingerich's second example, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Many churchgoing people in the United States do not accept the theory. This seems to be due to a number of reasons: an inability to reconcile scientific findings with a literal approach to Genesis, difficulty understanding how a process incorporating an element of chance can lead to a purposive outcome, and a reluc-



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tance to acknowledge that we share a family tree with chimps and gorillas. Gingerich carefully traces out the manner in which the evidence for evolution was assembled, and, like Darwin, he sees no difficulty in accepting that evolution was God's way of creating us.

Gingerich's final example is different. English astronomer Fred Hoyle started out as a militant atheist. He was one of the founders of the once popular Steady

State theory, which held that the universe had always existed and that it needed no Creator. But then along came the Big Bang theory, according to which the universe suddenly came into existence out of nothing. It was contingent, it had to be created—much as had always been maintained by religious believers—and it appears to have been fine-tuned for the development of life.

Hoyle himself made a seminal discov-



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ery in this regard concerning the synthesis of carbon in stars—an all-important element for the development of life. This was made possible by what appears to have been an enormous fluke involving something called nuclear resonance. This realization so shook Hoyle that he could not accept that it was an accident. Henceforward he was to claim that "a super intellect has monkeyed with the physics." Here we have an example of how science can sometimes have a profound influence on religious thinking.

Finally, Gingerich notes that an alternative to the idea that God has fine-tuned the universe to make it hospitable to life is the multiverse theory. It proposes that there are a vast number of universes all run on different lines with their own laws of nature and their own time and space. As living creatures we are in one of the freak universes that, purely by chance, are habitable. There is no way to verify that there are additional such universes; acceptance of their existence is an act of faith that atheists appear to have to make in order to keep a god out of the reckoning. We thus see that not only religion can affect scientific thinking. Other philosophies, including atheism, can overlap into the scientific magisterium too.

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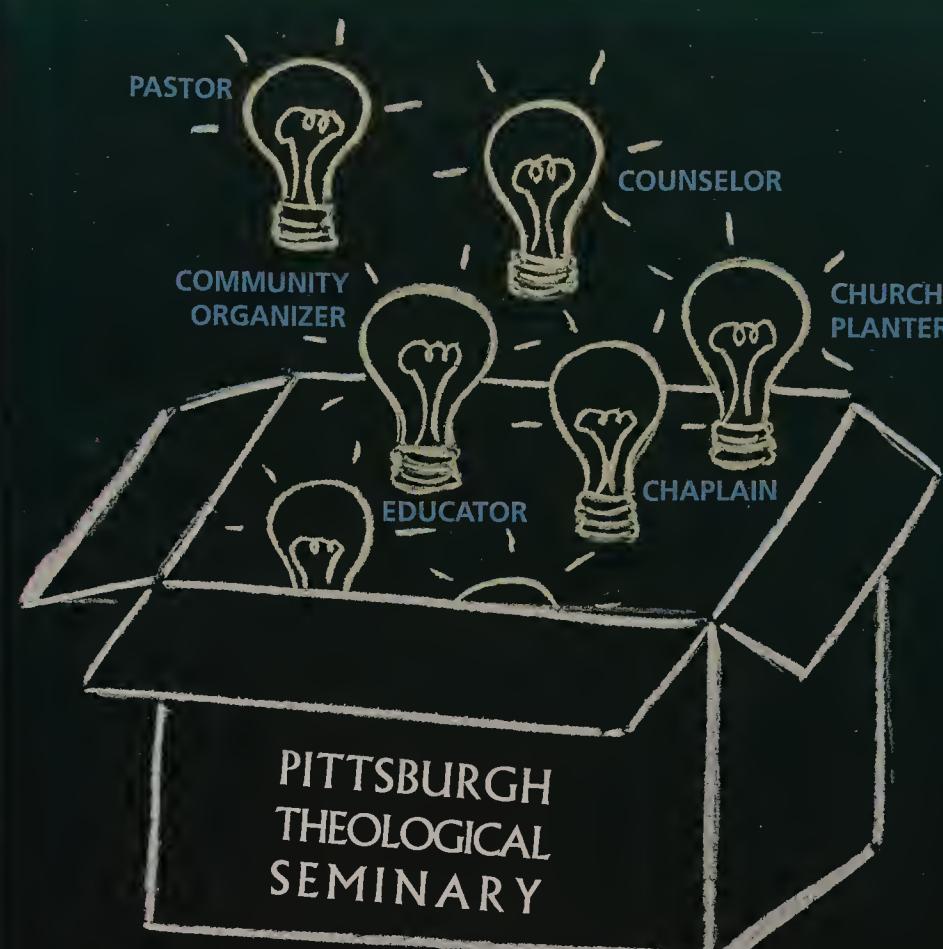
# BookMarks

**Meeting God in Mark:  
Reflections for the Season of Lent**  
By Rowan Williams  
Westminster John Knox, 98 pp.,  
\$12.00 paperback

Why is it that the book of Mark, unlike the other Gospels, is so short and fast-paced and contains so little of the teachings of Jesus and so few miracle stories? About a third of the Gospel is preoccupied with the passion of Jesus, and yet the author has little interest in dwelling on the question of why Jesus had to die. Williams argues that the writer wants the reader not to be distracted by Jesus' teaching or by miracles or by atonement theology but rather to encounter Jesus himself through reading and re-reading the story. Jesus came preaching a regime change or what could be called a change of management. It's a story about how God's power is not the same as our power. An encounter with Jesus leads to letting go of our fantasies about God's and our power, seeing instead God's power in the death and resurrection of the Crucified One. The book includes questions and scripture readings for Lent.

**In God's Hands: The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2015**  
By Desmond Tutu  
Bloomsbury USA, 160 pp., \$23.00

Nelson Mandela said that "Desmond Tutu's voice will always be the voice of the voiceless." Tutu speaks with such moral clarity and generosity of spirit because he also speaks for a capacious God who created all people in God's image and loves us all, yet has a special love for the marginalized. Tutu himself is clearly and fearlessly biased toward Origen's universalism: God's love is so powerful and irresistible that even the devil will ultimately be unable to resist it. The usual Tutu themes of *ubuntu* theology are here: authentic personhood is found through relationship with other persons; human differences shouldn't divide us; differences enrich the human family. Tutu's voice is ultimately a witness to the gospel of God's reconciling love.



The illustration shows a graduation cap (mortarboard) with several lightbulbs of different sizes and colors (yellow, blue, red) glowing inside it. Labels around the cap identify various ministry roles: PASTOR, COUNSELOR, CHURCH PLANTER, CHAPLAIN, EDUCATOR, and COMMUNITY ORGANIZER. Below the cap, a box contains the text "PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY".

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## Epic march

All eight movies nominated for best picture in this year's Oscar race are about men, and all but one of them are about white men. Some are ordinary men living ordinary lives, as in the coming-of-age masterpiece *Boyhood*. Many are exceptional men in exceptional circumstances, as in *American Sniper*, *The Theory of Everything*, *Whiplash*, and *The Imitation Game*. Others are eccentrics who win our hearts with their fervent resistance to normalcy, as in *Birdman* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. But in a year of collective protest and activism, of public debate about the meaning of our social union, these stories of lone heroes seem out of touch with the times.

The one exception on the list is *Selma*, about the civil rights march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital in 1965 to secure voting rights for black citizens. *Selma* is also about a great male leader, Martin Luther King Jr., and actor David Oyelowo highlights his brilliance, charisma, and leadership. But the film is not just the story of King's life, and not just the story of one particular campaign. Rather, it captures something more elusive in our fictions and in our politics: the feeling and dynamic of a collective movement.

The film opens with King's acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, a great set piece for a "great man" story. But after quickly emphasizing King's singularity and international acclaim, the film places him back within the tussle of an unwieldy movement. King's voice becomes one of many in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference who are debating what issues the group will pursue and what tactics they will employ.

The film captures the emotional fabric of collective organizing. In one scene SCLC organizers are sprawled around a



**COLLECTIVE ACTION:** Ava DuVernay's film *Selma* follows the 1965 voting rights marches from Selma to Montgomery led by Martin Luther King Jr. (David Oyelowo).

living room late in the night discussing the impediments to black voting in the state. The scene explains what black people were facing when they tried to register to vote: voucher requirements, poll taxes, intimidation tactics, and farcical registration exams. But the scene also evokes the rare moments when camaraderie and common purpose are transformed into the fixed resolve and unified action of a movement.

The viewer follows the organizers as they interact with each other in prison cells, around kitchen tables, and on long car rides through rural Alabama. The scenes reveal the ferocious intellects, personal sacrifices, and friendships that sustained and guided the SCLC.

Of course, the SCLC wasn't the only organization active in the civil rights movement. At the Selma march, grassroots organizers with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee bristled at the arrival of the famous leader and the media attention he brought. It would be easy to caricature these debates as being between young and old (though King was himself only 35 years old at the time) or between grassroots and established visions of activism. Instead the film humanizes the risk of compromise that each group feels when working together. As a united force, one action may achieve more than smaller actions alone, but that decision to unite is fraught with uncertainty, even when the aims are shared.

The film makes the viewer aware of other civil rights leaders who are often

obscured in our national elevation of King. Many are rendered with great humanity and pathos—including Ralph Abernathy (Colman Domingo), James Orange (Omar J. Dorsey), and Diane Nash (Tessa Thompson). At the same time the film makes clear that the choice of King as front man for the movement was both a strategy of the movement's leaders and a response to the liberal political establishment's choice of King as the leader they are willing to work with. As Lyndon Johnson (Tom Wilkinson) says, he'd rather have King as the public face of civil rights than "a militant like Malcolm X."

It's easy for a movie about King to be a simple history lesson. Not *Selma*. The movie feels "of our own moment." It is impossible to watch people taking to the streets to demand change in 1965 and not think of Ferguson or New York City in 2014. The bill of promises unfulfilled is still coming due.

The current political climate makes *Selma* not just a historical reminder of the roots of collective complicity in racial injustice and white supremacy but a powerful film that shows how personality, energy, motivation, and mission coalesce to create lasting change.

*Selma* is a rare delight as a work of art. It is also an emotional guide to the fragile work of collective action. For that reason it just might be the most important movie this year.

*The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University.*

by Philip Jenkins

**A** century ago, amid the blood and chaos of the First World War, a period of stunning Christian growth began, especially in Africa. This year, many Africans will commemorate the centennial of a man who perfectly symbolizes that transformation: John Chilembwe.

Notoriously, 1915 marked the beginning of the great massacres and expulsions of ancient Christian communities in the Ottoman realms of the Middle East. Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks all suffered, and Christians were purged from some of the most ancient centers of the faith. But while one Christian heartland was perishing, another was being born.

The vast expansion of Christianity in black Africa is partly due to the withdrawal of European missions. The war itself had a massive and catastrophic impact on African societies as European empires pursued bloody campaigns across vast swathes of the continent, disrupting traditional societies. The war made possible the apocalyptic influenza epidemic of 1918, which killed millions of Africans.

With their long-familiar worlds falling into ruin, Africans naturally sought religious solutions and turned to the prophets and healers who flourished so abundantly. Time and again, when we look at the leaders who would guide new African independent churches through the first

half of the century, we see that their move toward active faith occurred precisely during the wartime crises.

Although his career is closely associated with the war, Chilembwe himself belonged to an older generation. He was born around 1870 in Nyasaland, what is now Malawi. In 1889 Nyasaland became a British protectorate, which attracted missionaries like the English Baptist Joseph Booth. Booth held very radical views about African education, self-determination, and even independence, which he shared with his servant John Chilembwe.

In 1897 Chilembwe's connection with Booth gave him a life-changing opportunity. The two traveled to the United States, where Chilembwe attended the school that is now Virginia University of Lynchburg, a historically black institution. In America, he was inspired by figures like Booker T. Washington. For a thoughtful African appalled by colonial exploitation, visions of black liberation and self-determination were intoxicating, and they continued to develop after he returned to his homeland as an ordained Baptist minister. He became involved in campaigns to safeguard the land rights of native Africans, always a core issue in anti-imperial protests.

The outbreak of war made

such grievances still more acute. For the subjects of the British Empire, war brought greater exploitation of colonial territories, more taxes, demands for labor, and pressure to join the armed forces. The war itself came to Nyasaland: 19,000 local men joined Britain's colonial armies, and 200,000 more served as porters in campaigns in neighboring German East Africa. Chilembwe protested this involvement, complaining that so many Africans were "invited to die for a cause which is not theirs."

In January 1915 Chilembwe led an open insurrection after the model of John Brown to "strike a blow and die, for our blood will surely mean something at last." Two hundred rebels attacked local plantations, killing several whites.

Much like the revolt against slavery by John Brown, this rising was an ill-organized fiasco which completely failed to galvanize popular support. Colonial authorities responded savagely, killing Chilembwe and many supporters.

But the failed rising left behind a legacy of nationalist and Africanist sentiment. Chilembwe today is Malawi's greatest national hero. His face appears on Malawi's currency, and every January 15

the nation celebrates John Chilembwe Day.

Much about Chilembwe remains uncertain, not least his religious motivation. Almost certainly he was drawing heavily on Baptist apocalyptic ideas as well as on the Watch Tower movement in the United States (later known as Jehovah's Witnesses), which had identified 1914 as the year of Armageddon. Tragically, his lack of power and status means that few of his own words survive. Some historians see him as inspired much more by nationalism than faith. His rebellion, after all, took as its slogan the war cry, "Africa for the Africans."

Such nuances obscure the central legacy celebrated by Africa's independent churches, who claim Chilembwe as a symbol of a new native Christianity, free from its paternalistic and missionary roots. Whatever we make of Chilembwe himself, it is precisely from his time that we can trace the careers of so many other Christian prophets and leaders: of Simon Kimbangu in the Congo, of Engenas Lekganyane in South Africa, and the founders of West Africa's Aladura healing churches. In 1915, the Christian world turned upside down.

*Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.*

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**Winnetka Congregational Church** is a 160 year-old, independent, lay-led, mission-focused congregation in Winnetka, Illinois with a history of making an impact in our community, the greater Chicago area and the world. We're searching and praying for a Senior Pastor who shares our life-changing Mission and Vision. **Is God calling you here to help us grow in faith, membership, stewardship and impact?**

**Winnetka Congregational Church**

**Don't let God's call go to voicemail.**

To apply or learn more go to <http://vsearch.ws/winnetkasrpastor>

# we need to talk about this.



**It's hard to talk about race in America without becoming defensive and shutting down. What makes it even harder is that so few of us actually know each other in the fullness of our stories.**

**Sandhya Rani Jha recasts the difficult conversation about race and faith in real people's stories, reminding us that God calls us to build Beloved Community.**

**"This book will make you want to pray, cry, laugh, reevaluate, and act—all in the service of true racial healing."**

**Christena Cleveland, author of *Disunity in Christ***

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***Headlands and Furrows* (top) and *Winter Field* (bottom), by Abner Hershberger**

The work of octogenarian artist Abner Hershberger reveals the religious sensibilities and Midwest landscapes of his youth. Viewers notice the intentional interplay of abstraction and representation. Even the unfamiliar is made familiar: furrows, land, sky, fallow ground, lines, circles that radiate. “In memory [these landscapes] seem poetic and are a constant source for visual expression,” he writes. “Abstracted, their imprint seems even bolder, somewhat the way it feels when working the land. It beckons as though it were a spiritual ritual.”

*Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor in Boston.*



Join us for four and a half days of ecumenical worship, plenary presentations, discussions, spiritual renewal, and recreation in an idyllic setting off the coast of Door County, Wisconsin.

## WASHINGTON ISLAND FORUM

# Reappropriating the Word

with John Bell

In this series of talks, John Bell will go beyond a Protestant preoccupation with “what the Bible really means,” focused on a “right answers” mentality. Bell will open up a more holistic appreciation for the Word of God that values its intentionally diverse character and is informed by his interactions with scripture in contexts of social deprivation.

Registration: \$299

**John Bell**, from Scotland, is a member of the Iona Community. He is a liturgist, preacher, and collector and composer of church music. His work takes him frequently to Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. He is well known in North America from numerous speaking tours and musical compositions published by GIA.



**The Curse of Literacy:** Most Christians in every age have either been unable to read scripture or have not had access to a Bible. Yet these people have much to teach us about scriptural literacy.

**Retell Me the Old, Old Story:** Some of the most familiar biblical texts fail to excite, incite, or bless us because the way they've been commonly read and expounded owes much to the cultural norms of a previous era.

**Missing Women:** Finding a monogamous Jewish patriarch requires almost as much work as finding a virtuous woman in the Hebrew scriptures. Why is this and can the situation be redeemed?

**The Importance of the Imagination:** The imagination is sometimes seen as the bogus gift of the Holy Spirit. Without it, our understanding of scripture will most certainly be diminished.

**What Shall We Tell the Children?** Are there other pertinent scriptures to teach young people besides Moses in the bulrushes, Daniel in the lion's den, and the Baby Jesus asleep in the hay?